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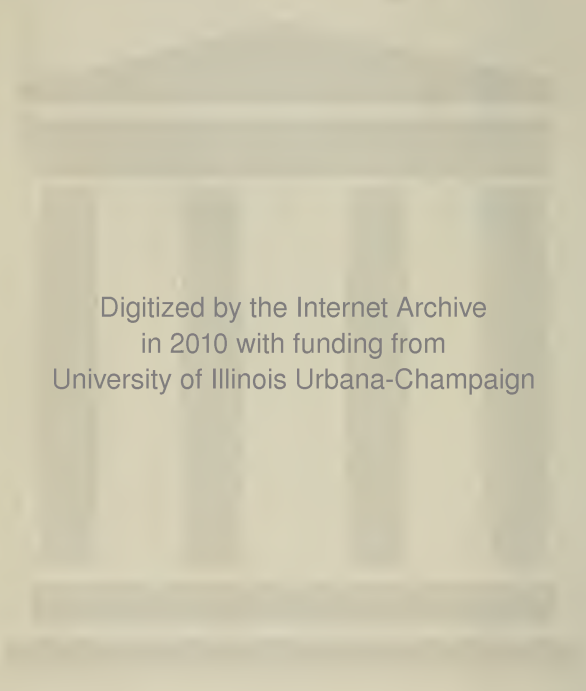
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CÆSAR BORGIA; ¹⁶⁷

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITEFRIARS."

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime ?
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,
Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime ?
BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1846.

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CÆSAR BORGIA.

CHAPTER I.

———“ Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection ; they aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts.”

Hamlet.

MEANWHILE the Hospitaller turned to look for the young Jewess, but she had fled into the house the instant she was released from Oliverotto's grasp, leaving her torch burning on the balcony floor. Apprehensive that terror acting on a disordered fancy might have driven her to some desperate act,—perhaps not without an impulse of curiosity,—the knight raised the torch, and stepped from the balcony into a chamber on a level with it.

It was a large but ruinously dilapidated apartment, into which the doors of a nest of smaller rooms opened, all apparently in a similar condition. The few articles of furniture were in such a state of

mouldering decay as showed that they had been long out of use. There was so deep a silence in these chambers, that after a moment's intent listening, Alfonso concluded that the fugitive had not taken refuge in any of them, more especially as he discerned the massive carved posts of a staircase which probably descended to an inhabited part of the house. On approaching he perceived that it was abrupt and steep as a ladder, piercing a square hole, which scarcely allowed room for the action of the limbs, and made it necessary to descend backwards. Not much wondering at this economy of space in the limited Ghetto, the knight yet hesitated as to the propriety of adopting such a means of descent, uncertain what might await him below, or how his visit might be construed. But hearing no sound below, calling and no one replying, pity and curiosity alike urging him, he boldly continued his quest.

Descending, the Hospitaller soon found the wall behind break off, and unwilling to run the chances with his back turned, and arms powerless, he dropped the remainder of the steps. The clash of his armour rang through the desolate house, and he brushed his torch so rudely in the scramble of the fall, that it was some moments ere he could fan it into a light sufficiently strong to second his investigations. What he saw then confirmed a conjecture which he had formed from the scent of drugs and herbs, that he was in the apothecary's shop, to whom the house seemed to belong. An infinite array of dusty jars, phials emblazoned with mysterious emblems, stuffed lizards, a mummy, serpents and various strange

animals preserved in liquids, which were many of them dried up, a rusty basin to bleed in, cauterizing irons, and other implements of (thank God !) antique surgery, with a leaden table, massive and shapeless as a butcher's block, in the centre, covered with cabalistical lines and figures from which to calculate the favourable instant of swallowing medicines or performing operations,—comprised the stock in trade.

The dusty and neglected aspect of the whole pharmacy indicated that the owner had not many calls on his skill, and apologized for his absence, even if it were not probable that he was one of the *contubernium* allotted to hear the sermon. But no other living soul appeared, and as there seemed to be no exit but by a strongly barred door and casement, closed with iron panels, after a glance over the medicinal wares, Alfonso concluded that the object of his search must have remained above. Under this persuasion he was about to remount the stairs, when he distinctly heard what seemed to be a sob or sigh from below the spot where he stood. Glancing suddenly round he perceived a slight glimmer in a large chimney-place behind, although there was certainly no fire in it ; and stumbling as he went over some old crucibles in his hurry, he found, with astonishment, that the light fell from what appeared to be an open trapdoor in the back wall of the chimney, masked by the projection of the front. The same light revealed a flight of narrow steps on each side, which ascended to it.

More than ever piqued by curiosity, and insensible

to the fears which would have restrained most men from gratifying it under such circumstances, Don Alfonso took only the precaution to leave his torch in one of the numerous cracks in the stones of the chimney, and rapidly climbed the steps. Stooping nearly double to enter the trapdoor, he perceived a broader flight of stairs down the inside of the wall, to the right of which extended a dark chamber, or but very dimly lighted by some embers which glowed on a hearth opposite. This feeble radiance lighted up occasionally, and showed that the vault—for it seemed little better—was filled with a strange heap of lumber, multifarious and diversified as the contents of a cave in which wreckers had stowed the pillage of a drowned armada; perhaps lodged there as in a place of safety. Some furniture of a very mean description,—among the rest a bed overhung by a tattered tent once of rich brocade, the shelter of some princely chieftain in the field; rude articles of domestic use oddly mingled with others, which, although tarnished to blackness, seemed from their rich workmanship to be wrought in precious metals; a huge pair of bellows; a variety of strangely twisted chemical machines scattered round a cold furnace within another chimney as ample as that by which the knight entered; a large oaken wardrobe, elaborately welded with brass—were some of the objects on which he glanced. But his attention was immediately absorbed in the figure of the young Jewess, couched upon the hearth, and listening with head erect like a fawn in covert, and features startled into rationality, but still with a degree of wildness and vacuity.

Uncertain as to the effect which his appearance might produce, Don Alfonso hesitated on the summit of the stairs. But during that pause, a momentary gleam lighted up his arms, and the girl perceived him, for she sprang up, and uttered a shriek of absolute despair. There was now only a choice of evils, and the knight preferred that of descending slowly into the vault, at the same time exhorting the Jewess not to be alarmed, announcing that his intention was merely to ascertain that she was not injured by the rough handling of the unmanly wretch from whom he had rescued her. The first tones of his voice seemed to re-assure her; and looking up, she suddenly changed her cries into a wild peal of laughter, clapped her hands as if in ecstasy, and rushed to meet him. As suddenly, however, she paused, and stared at him in amazement, as if struck with his lofty stature, or with his half-warlike and half-monkish array, differing probably from any costume she had seen. "But is it really thou?" she exclaimed, after a moment's profound pause. "'Tis long, indeed, since we have met! but thou art now so tall—tall as a cedar!—Or art thou—who art thou?"

"I am he who rescued thee from the rude soldier in the balcony.—But didst thou expect some stranger of my tokens, that thou gazest thus at me, fair Miriam?" said the Hospitaller, very gently.

"No, no, it is not he!—No, no, he will never come again!" murmured the girl to herself, softly. "And yet he had a voice very like—full of the sweet bells that sing silvery to each other! Do not

mock me, Francesco!—What needed it to come in this disguise? for indeed, dear love, I will never reproach thee,—never tell thee what I have thought of thy long absence,—and how I have wept my brain so dry, that I can never weep again, were each drop a precious pearl!—Speak, my own Francesco! and only say that it was not scorn of the poor Jewish girl that has kept thee so long away!—Speak, dearest! thou needst not fear the witches will suspect—for they tell me thou art dead and gone; and besides they are gone—gone, as thou wert wont to say, to meet the Evil One in Africa.—Nay, if thou wilt not answer me, I will get a light and see thy face. I shall know it if it is not so pale as—thy cheeks were like blowing carnations until—But no, no, no; he is dead, he is dead, he is dead!”

“Francesco!” mused the Hospitaller, and then smiled derisively at his own sudden recollection that it was the name of the murdered Duke of Gandia—but also of almost every tenth person in Italy.

Meanwhile the Jewish girl, clinging with the tenacity of the mind diseased to its favourite visions, even when dispelled by gleams of saner memory, hurried to the hearth, and after groping about for some moments lighted a lamp shaped like a twisted dragon, and returned to the knight with great eagerness. Quietly awaiting the result of her scrutiny, he stood in silence and suffered her to survey him from head to foot. But after gazing long and wistfully at his face, she shook her head, and with a deep sigh seemed to abandon her

thought, whatever it might be, and set the lamp down.

"Thou seest I am not he; but for whom didst thou mistake me, Miriam?" said the Hospitaller, earnestly—perhaps too earnestly,—for the Jewess looked at him with sudden suspicion and alarm.

"What dost thou want with him!—to betray him to the sorceresses? To the Scarlet Man with the ashy face?" she said bitterly; adding with a wild triumphant laugh, "but thou canst not; I have hidden him too well for any of you to find him; nor shall you touch him until ye have torn my heart out, and I will shriek until your God has heard as well as mine!—And He is good and just and merciful, or you Christians—Oh, you Christians!—what said the good rabbi but now?"

She reclined her chin on her hand, and seemed endeavouring to recall the Dominican's words, or at least meaning, to mind; while Alfonso dwelt with a pertinacity which he could only ascribe to the forcible impression which the boatman's narrative had made on his imagination, on the expression relating to the "Scarlet Man."

"Our law is the rock of Horeb—and yours the sweet waters which gushed out of it, at which all the nations may drink peace and salvation," murmured the Jewish girl, probably repeating the very words of the preacher. "But what is peace?—is it death?—for when he was dead—with all those cruel stabs—how calm he lay!"

There was a short pause, during which Miriam looked vacantly and inquiringly up at the knight.

“Wert thou decked out as gaily as now when—when the Scarlet Man was here?” he said at last, with hesitation.

“It was not here, thou knowest, but in the chambers above—they brought him here too—but that was in my dream,” replied Miriam. “Indeed, my lord, it was a dreadful dream !—But I was much finer than I am now, for they all loved me then, and thought diamonds too mean for me to wear; and I had no delight but to dress myself in the prettiest things, and to braid my hair, when I knew that he was coming. But they did not !”

“And was thy dream so sad ?—I pray thee tell it to me, Miriam; thou seest I am as dark as cypress, and I love to hear sad tales,” said the knight.

“Oh, but I may not tell it to thee, nor to any one, or my grandames will murder me too !” replied the Jewess. “But it was very horrible !—to hear the blood go drop, drop !—to see them all run in upon him with their long keen poniards, and press them into his poor flesh, while thousands and thousands of voices—Oh, how I shrieked murder, murder, murder ! until this roof rang like the clatter of hoofs at the tournament, where we saw him first ! But my voice became like wool, and would not sound !—Knight, thou art in a beggar’s harness compared with him that day ! I stole out when they were busy—puff, puff, puffing—and the embers flaming, and all their bottles red hot in the glow—little dreaming that I had wandered from my wheel with Dinah and old Rebecca to see the Christian

show!—But then to see them lift him up so drenched in blood that it ran down his bright hair—for when he was dead he could not keep his head up, I remember.”

“And who was thy Francesco that wore such noble armour? And didst thou dream that he was murdered here—and *by thy people*?” said the Hospitaller, in a tone of carelessness which he thought would disarm the poor mad girl’s suspicions.

“No, it was all a dream—a wicked dream; and I am to be punished some day in fiery mines for remembering it,” she said with profound sadness, and tears trickled fast but unheeded down her face, and she seemed to sink into a puzzled reverie. The Hospitaller awaited the result in silence, hoping that some clearer revelation might rise in her chaotic memory. But suddenly she raised her eyes, wiped the tears hastily away, and looked at him with a gaze full of mingled suspicion and dread. “But yet,” she said at length hesitatingly, “thou art not like the serpent that came and questioned me with his oily tongue, and whispered lies of him, and said he loved another better far, and challenged me else to win him from his appointment with her that night—the beautiful bright lady that was queen at the tournament!—but it was only one of my aunt’s devils, you must know, sir,—for when he came they murdered him!”

“Loved another!—and who was she? What did men call her?” exclaimed the knight.

“Oh, she was so beautiful, that indeed it was a scorpion in my breast to hear it said! Hast thou not

—come from what land thou wilt—heard of the daughter of the Christian high priest, Donna Lucrezia?”

“And thy Francesco preferred her to thee?” returned the Hospitaller, with a start.

“No, no, no!—’tis false!—he came, he came!” said the Jewess, with eyes that flashed through her tears. “Thou art a devil, too, to belie him thus, for when I told him what the serpent visage said—”

“Ay! what did he answer then?” returned the Hospitaller, breathlessly.

“Hush! didst thou not hear a step?” interrupted Miriam, staring wildly, and tossing her black hair from her shoulders to listen.

“Embers sinking on the hearth. But tell me, Miriam, I adjure thee, what said he when thou didst upbraid him with his inconstancy?”

“That was the very way they came!—I heard them creeping up the stairs, and listening and whispering, and thought it was but the wind,” replied the Jewess, lifting her slender finger with a wildly startled look. “But thou art not asleep as he was!—He looked so beautiful in his sleep that it ever grieved me to waken him when the sweet dawn came, though I knew the witches would have killed him had they found him there.”

“But what said he to thy gentle jealousies, fair Miriam? Did he smile?” reiterated the knight.

“Nay, I knew not till then that he could look so terrible! And he swore that if—that if—on the following day I would fly from the Ghetto to—to—whither was it?” said Miriam, pressing her forehead between her hands. “His cruel brother was to be

gone then, that would have betrayed how the Christian knight had made the Jewish girl his only love—and then—he would show me, he said, how it was impossible that he should seek that lady's love, fair though she might be, and would slay the fiend who told me so, if I could show him who it was! But even as he spoke—hark!—there are muffled feet coming up the stairs!”

“We are below stairs here, remember thee, poor Miriam!” said the Hospitaller, much agitated. “But who, then, was thy Francesco, that he boasted such power over life and death? Some great lord, doubtless. Was he one of the Orsini, whose palace is so near the Ghetto?”

“The Orsini!—there is not one of their proudest worthy to hold my Francesco's stirrup, when he mounted on his joyful steed!” returned the Jewish girl with wild enthusiasm. “So good, so beautiful, so brave!—the smile on his red lips was brighter than a ruby's sparkle, and when he looked into mine eyes, my soul dissolved away in happiness! But I dreamed of him long, long before I saw him, and there was nothing pleasant to me because I saw him not. Yet it was all a dream—else, wherefore, being so great a lord, would he never tell me more than that his name was Francesco? But what needed I to know more? He was himself, if he had had no name but his own beauty!”

“But if thou didst love him so, wouldst thou not avenge his cruel murder?” said the Hospitaller. “Does it not darken sunshine to thee when thou markest those of thy people who were his assassins,

smiling at one another with the sweet recollection of their bloody vengeance, when they meet in the market place?"

"Nay, they were demons in masks, raised by the witches, my aunts," replied Miriam, musingly. "All but one—and my Francesco tore that from the face of the Scarlet Man, to show me how it had been turned in hell to the palest ashes—paler than those of a pinewood fire when the morning shines on it."

"But that one—that one!—wert thou to behold his face again, surely thou hast not forgotten that one?" said Alfonso.

"I tell thee again! they were all devils raised by Notte and Morta to tear him to pieces—for they laughed and held me while it was all done!" returned the girl pettishly; and the recollection of the boatman's story, and the circumstance of the girl who came shrieking after the victim, pursued by two old women, recurred to him almost with the force of conviction. But still he had but his own suspicions as to who the mysterious murderer might have been. The mingling of Lucrezia's name renewed all his perplexities. Was it not possible that the jealousy of an enraged woman, not the fury of a rival, or the ambition of a younger brother, had wrought that dismal tragedy? Tales which he had heard of the strange disappearances of persons even of high rank, who were supposed to be lovers of Lucrezia, occurred to him. But this reasoning was based on a hope which now glided into his thoughts, that the Jewess's unfortunate lover was not the Duke of Gandia. The number of assassinated persons thrown nightly into

the river, as into a common reservoir, permitted this dark wandering of the bright spirit ; for even to find Lucrezia a murderess, rather than the worse horror which the enemies of her house represented her, appeared to him a hope. And yet the name—Francesco ! The only possible solution of the direful riddle—the only possible light to be obtained—seemed to glimmer in the evanescent flashes of the Hebrew girl's half-extinguished intellect.

She watched him during his musing with a vacant sort of curiosity, carelessly weaving her long hair into ringlets.

“ But when they had killed him, what did they with the gashed body ? ” he said at last.

“ Oh, I will show thee very soon. I found out the trick when it was too late,” she replied, with sudden vivacity, and darting towards the massive wardrobe which we adverted to in describing the locale, she pulled a chain, which raised a strong bolt ; then opening the leaves of the wardrobe, the Hospitaller beheld with amazement, by the light of the lamp which she hastened to bring, that a stream of water flowed past between the houses and a dead wall of equal height, which was roofed in.

“ And whither flows this dark stream, Miriam ? ” he said, looking up both ways, and ascertaining that the corridor, or covered way, extended without any apparent exit on either.

“ Only the rats and the Jews are to know that,” replied the girl, with a smile of simple cunning, as if she had detected and were baffling some tricky purpose.

“Miriam, hear me!” said the Hospitaller, a thought occurring to him. “Thou hast seen that mine arm is strong!—Thou art but fooled by thy cruel grandames to believe that demons slew thy beautiful lover—some rival among the Christians has slain him, perchance for the love of that fair lady of whom it was spoken to thee. Now, if amidst all the crowds which are assembled at these feasts of the Jubilee, thou canst or wilt point out to me those—him—who wrought this deed, I swear by all that is holy both to Jews and Christians I will avenge thee so that thou thyself shalt cry ‘Enough!’”

“I cannot see them;—I go to no feasts now—the witches will not let me,” she replied, with evidently startled attention.

“But is there not some secret exit contrived by thy people from the Ghetto by this stream?” said the knight. “Name but where I may find thee at to-morrow’s sunrise, and I will be thy guide and champion through all their galliard shows—and we will discover the murderers of thy noble lover.”

“The witches will kill me if I stir out of their house—but I never thought of this!” said the Jewess, with a deep sigh. “They say I am crazed, and must not even go into the market place now to show my pretty sparkling stones and my eyes, which were brighter far before I wept them away!”

“But if thou art crazed—if they say thou art, Miriam, it is the wont of madness to love wandering, and that may plead thine apology if even the old dames discover thou art flown from their perch awhile,” returned the Hospitaller.

“Hi, hi!—but how folks will laugh to see the Christian knight and the Jewish girl together, and hoot at me and stone us both!—for so Francesco said,” replied Miriam, with a faint hysteric giggle, stopped by a shower of tears.

The knight himself was for a moment perplexed.

“But who, gentle Miriam, will note us in the hurlyburly? And if they do, ’tis the office and devoir of a true knight to shield and succour all women, be their nation or religion what it hath pleased God,” returned the Hospitaller.

“And wilt thou, indeed, with thy strong right arm, avenge—for now I remember it was thou who rescued me from the armed man, when I was looking for Francesco in the crowd!” she replied, hurriedly.

“For Francesco!” repeated the Hospitaller, with some disappointment at this reversion of incompatible ideas.

“Yes, signor; for I said to my heart, if he is among them all—those Christians—he will see me, and remember, and then he must needs take pity on me—at least he will tell me why he despises me so much that he never even said, ‘Miriam, I am weary of thee!’” said the Jewess, mournfully. “Why should he not even tell me why he scorned me—why he never wished to see me again? Perchance they have told him lies of me, as they will ever of poor souls who love so much they know not how to hide it; but then it needs only a word to set all right again when truth is listened to.”

“Wherefore then wilt thou not abroad with me

and seek him out?" said the Hospitaller, tacking to this new gust. "When canst thou hope to see him and tell thy truths, penned up in these darksome places, where he never comes?"

Miriam looked at her adviser with a kind of wondering doubt; but she suddenly exclaimed, with eyes and features kindling with rage, "Devil! I know thee now!—thou art he who came before as the leaden-visaged Spanish liar, for all thou art so changed!—the witches have sent thee to find out who my Francesco is,—and then my dream will all come true!"

Confounded with this new turn, the Hospitaller stood for some moments in silence, scarcely noticing a slight murmur which much more vividly attracted the attention of the Jewess.

"They come, they come!" she exclaimed, in a breathless undertone, and startled into some degree of sane recollection. "Fly, fly, or we shall both be murdered!—They are all coming to take away their precious things, now the Christians are gone, and surely if they find thee here they will do murder, lest thou shouldst report their wealth to thy people!"

The whispering of several voices, and a sound as if of unlocking or unbarring the doors of the pharmacy, were distinctly audible; and brave and powerful as he was, the Hospitaller was by no means so much a paladin as to despise the danger of being surrounded by numbers, under circumstances which would prompt the kindled passions of the Hebrew population.

“Whither does this marvellous passage conduct?” he exclaimed.

“To the marsh below Palazzo Orsini, out of the walls,” replied Miriam, wringing her hands. “They come, they come!—they will not believe us—they will murder thee, and call me bitter names—follow the stream, the stream! Fly, fly!”

“I will only depart on condition that thou meetest me to-morrow in the Forum—the Ox-market as ye call it in Rome—with the early light,” returned the Hospitaller.

“Yes, yes, I will meet thee there, even if they kill me!—indeed, indeed, I swear it!” said the girl, hurriedly essaying with her feeble force to draw him to the exit.

“Swear to me by all thy hopes of seeing thy Francesco again, in heaven or on earth!” said Alfonso, hastening his own movements towards it.

“I swear—I swear!”

“But thou wilt forget!—Promise not once to look at this strange portal, but to remember thy pledge!” said the Hospitaller.

“I will—I will!—it is not deep!” she exclaimed, as the knight took the lamp, and threw its radiance on the rapid water. “’Tis crystal pure, too, for we use it in kneading the shew-bread.—On, on!”

The knight indeed hesitated in descending the two or three steps which led to the channel, for a momentary suspicion of treachery crossed his mind when he glanced down the watery way. But the anxious implicitness of the Jewess’s countenance re-

assured him, and hearing the muttering gibber of the two old women's voices approaching the chamber, he pressed Miriam's hand to his heart, and descended the steps. "I will take thy lamp," he said, with a smile, "for they will scold thee for losing it, and so keep up the recollection of thy pledge."

Miriam made no reply, but by a strange laugh in which fear and a vague sense of the ridiculous mingled, and closed the opening with such rapidity that the Hospitaller was barred out before he had well concluded the observation.

He found himself perched on a loose step partially laved by the waters as they passed. The stream was not deep, unless its exceeding purity deceived the eye. Probably it flowed from some spring in the neighbouring Capitoline, and was thus carefully covered in by the inhabitants no less as a means of eluding the vigilance of their jailers, than to gratify an oriental scrupulosity in diet. That at which he had made his exit, however, appeared to Alfonso the only door opening on the water. High square holes with buckets hanging at them, suggested the means by which the neighbours took in their supplies.

Several voices of men speaking confusedly and in raised and indignant tones were now audible to the knight; and apprehending more for the girl's sake than his own, if the gleam of his torch should be observed through the chinks, he shaded it, and stepped into the channel. It was deeper than he had at first conjectured, flowing over his knee; but carefully pebbled, and somewhat raised in the centre.

Proceeding along this line, and reconnoitring as he advanced, he saw that the water flowed down so rapid an inclination that but for the intervention of numerous dams it must have become very shallow.

Alfonso began to muse on the probabilities that the stream would terminate in some deep cistern or reservoir. A dark thought assailed him that he was perhaps barred in a place whence there was no exit, and where he might miserably perish for the importance of the secret which he had discovered of their hidden wealth, would drive the Jews to desperation, so that a return through their quarters was impossible. Still it was not likely that a project so treacherous and malignant could enter the bewildered fancy of the young Jewess; considering, too, the poignant recollections which she seemed to preserve of a former scene of bloodshed and betrayal. This thought conjured up a vision of the horrible tragedy in the knight's imagination, and so vividly, that the flashes of the lamp on the water startled him at times as if they were gouts of blood speeding past. So strongly did this fancy work that once he thought he heard shrieks, and paused to listen.

Perhaps it was still but the sport of imagination on his excited organs, but it seemed to him as if he heard remote halloos and shouts, above all which was distinct the voice of Miriam, repeating her "Fly, fly!" in accents of frantic warning. If she were indeed urging on his flight, or merely giving way to the vagaries of delirium, was of equal portent, and the Hospitaller hastened on.

But a greater perplexity shortly awaited him. The dark way suddenly terminated. A wall as high as the roofing was before him, beneath which, at a low massive archway scarcely high enough to allow it, the waters crept out of the Ghetto. The knight could scarcely bring himself even to imagine that the Israelites got out of their inclosure by crawling under this arch, at the hazard of being suffocated in the water. Still he could discern no other way, and his heart beat high with feelings very unusual in that stout breast, when he approached to satisfy himself by a diligent search that there was no other possible exit.

Approaching the arch, he was almost instantly struck by observing that there were stones jutting out at intervals so as to make an easy ascent of a few steps to the top of its curve. Satisfied that there was a use for this contrivance, though he could as yet perceive none, Alfonso mounted the stairs, and reaching the summit of the arch in two or three strides, he stood amazed at the ingenuity of the trick which he discovered. The wall instead of resting on the arch, as it seemed at a distance, was separated from it by a space sufficiently wide to allow the stoutest man to drop between. Then by stooping double it was possible to pass under a second archway, much higher than the first, to which by an illusion of perspective it seemed to be joined, when viewed from the exterior. The blue darkness at the extremity convinced the knight that he should then be in the open air.

He delayed but little after this discovery, and

passing without much difficulty beneath the outer arch, emerged, as he expected, outside the walls of the Ghetto. A sedgy marsh through which the stream crept into the Tiber,—the river and its island covered with massive ruins and cypresses standing motionless in the windless air,—were before him.

Concluding that if he kept by the wall he should reach some gate into the Ghetto, at which he might enter to learn what had happened in the pursuit of the Jewess's assailant, he took that course. Startling the waterfowl which had built their nests on the deserted shore, and avoiding the numerous pools of stagnant water by their glare in the moonlight, the knight at length reached a scattered suburb of mean cottages, all silent and emptied of their sight-seeing dwellers. Then came a succession of narrow and equally deserted lanes, passing through some of which he suddenly emerged in an open square. Great numbers of people were thronging into it from various quarters. One side of the space was occupied by a lofty palace, or rather fortress, for it was mounted with cannon, and secured by massive walls. Remembering that the Orsini palace was raised on the ruins of an ancient Roman theatre, and contrasting the grand Grecian architecture of the lower storeys of the pile with the Gothic battlements and towers which ran above, the Hospitaller had little doubt that he stood before the stronghold of that powerful race.

He listened for an instant to the hubbub of conversation around him, and soon found that the mob were of those who had been in the Ghetto. He inquired

of one of the loudest and most gesticulating of the incomers, who happened to be our worthy little friend Paschino, the tailor, what the matter was.

“Matter enough! when a Christian may not even honour a Jew girl with a kiss but he must be hunted like a water-rat!” replied Paschino, who was nothing, if not critical. “Besides, it was a trick to get up a tumult, that the Jews might cut all our throats in their narrow macaroni lanes. At first, the noble gentlemen about the preacher (bless their thick skulls!) would have it that one of their acquaintance had rescued the girl; and they ransacked the Jew’s house, but found nobody in it—not even the wench. And while we are all busy looking for them like fools as we were born, in gallipots and rat-holes, came in two old hags who looked as if they had been to have their beards singed in hell, and swore that their niece was mad, and must have run out of the house. Whereupon I told them that they were not mad who left, but who stayed in such a musty pomegranate; and Fra Bruno, seeing people’s temper rise, seized his cross, and commanded us one and all to troop it out of the Ghetto, and those who hesitated he drove before him—and so here we are all!”

“And the fellow who caused the disturbance escaped?” said the knight.

“Of course—and who *should* escape but the guilty?” returned Paschino.

“And Fra Bruno has taken refuge with the Orsini in their palace?” said Don Alfonso.

“Refuge!—why should Fra Bruno take refuge?” replied the tailor. “Unless indeed from the envy of

his thickhead brethren, which has driven him, they say, to live as a hermit on Mount Aventine, in the ruins of the baths there,—whither he is now gone after giving us all more than my mother thought necessary for me at least,—a blessing.”

“Mount Aventine!—surely he hath not gone alone to that desert!” said the knight, startled with his recollection of the attempt to assassinate the friar.

“Worse than alone, for he hath the fat fool, Biccocco, with him,” said Paschino. “’Tis strange how fond these deeply wise men are of the company of fools!—and yet he shuns the society of women worse than that of black vipers!”

“He is in danger, if he hath no other company,” exclaimed the Hospitaller. “Canst thou guide me to these ruins, Paschino, where he has his hermitage?”

“Yea, like a sign-post, than which I will stir no more over that ground by night!” replied the tailor. “Let those go the journey that have business at the end of it,—let the arrow fly that has a mark! I have heard enough how he treats his disciples!—certes, not with loaves and fishes; nay, what is rarer, he declines them himself, though confessor to a lady who has cause no doubt to be grateful for absolutions. Perhaps, indeed, he has not yet been offered aught large enough for his appetite, for you don’t catch wolves with almond-cakes.”

“It were charity in thee to guide me on his way, for I have reason to believe the good man’s life is in danger,” returned the knight, eagerly.

“Nay, for he is said to be so skilful an anatomist

and physician, that he might take a fancy to see how I came to be so small.—And your Spaniards when they set about a thing have as much mercy as carrion-crows picking the eyes of a dying horse,” said Paschino, with a start.

“Is Fra Bruno a Spaniard?” returned the Hospitaller.

“Is the devil a Dutchman!—who knows not that? How else should he climb to honours in Italy, and be the right hand of my Lady Donna Lucrezia?”

The latter part of this question revived the recollection of the pilgrim of Compostella’s observations on the monk, and of the pressing nature of the peril which beset him. Alfonso renewed his request, but his earnestness rather gave the tailor suspicions of his intentions, than any inclination to second them. Perhaps even he thought that the knight himself was on an errand of no good import to Fra Bruno, whose doctrines were already suspected to have brought him into bad odour in the Vatican. Such was the terror which the Borgian tyranny had infused, that the poor tailor was seized on the thought with a grievous panic. Finally, he acted like the labourer in the fable who promised not to tell the huntsman where the deer lay, and only pointed to its refuge. He described the way to the monk’s hermitage, and took the opportunity of a general commotion in the crowd, caused by two men who had drawn daggers on some slight quarrel, and slunk out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

“ But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
 And *there* hath been thy bane . . .

 And who can view the ripened rose, nor seek
 To wear it? who can curiously behold
 The smoothness and the sheen of beauty’s cheek,
 Nor feel the heart can never all grow old?”

TAKING the route indicated by the gibing tailor, the knight gradually cleared himself of the mob from the Ghetto, and passed through several streets in which only a few devotees crossed his path, gliding from shrine to shrine. What his own object was he could scarcely have said. To warn the confessor of his danger, and to use the interest which he might acquire by the service in obtaining some light on his perplexities, even of that involuntary sort which looks and gestures yield—curiosity and humanity—were motives so inextricably mingled that he could not have decided which was the strongest.

So lost in thought went he, that learned as, considering the age, he might be called, Don Alfonso passed through the deserted valley between the

Palatine and Aventine, without ever noticing that the ruined arches scattered so far along the way were the remains of the famous Circus Maximus. Silence more profound — desolation more complete—the deserts of Palmyra could not have offered, for both were deepened rather than broken by the distant hum of the agitated city. A few shepherds' huts, and ruins, then as now possessed this hill, which had once been covered with palaces.

Gradually all traces of a road vanished, and on each side were woody acclivities, covered with ruins and melancholy cypresses. The only guide of the Knight of St. John was now a small stream which traversed the valley, and which Paschino had informed him flowed very near the ruins of which he was in search. The guide indeed was faithful, and after murmuring through a deep wood, the underwood of which was chiefly of wild roses in full blossom, it conducted him into a verdant desert, in the midst of which the vast ruins of the Baths of Caracalla are scattered. For a few minutes the knight stood breathlessly gazing at the immense destruction—the wilderness of shattered arches, lonely columns, useless porticoes, fallen walls, or but standing in parts like jagged towers attesting the former height of the whole—which stretched beneath his gaze.

The hopelessness of searching among these unknown masses for the Dominican's hermitage, struck Alfonso instantly; and he would probably have returned on his steps, but that he chanced to perceive a figure advancing out of the ruins, as if coming towards the city. Hoping that it might prove either

some follower of the monk, or peasant acquainted with the locality, he hastened to meet the stranger, who came on, muttering and crossing himself, as if at prayer, and so lost in his devotions that he took no notice of the knight until he was within a few yards of him. Alfonso had seated himself, in expectation of his approach, on the half-buried capital of a pillar, and rising suddenly, his apparition excited so much terror in the beholder, that he uttered a terrific yell, and fled ! But in that instant Alfonso had recognized the bravo of the Ghetto, and was about to rush in pursuit, when a light suddenly appeared among the ruins, and a voice quaggy with fat and alarm called out, "What ails thee, brother?"

Alfonso dreaded that the mischief he had come to prevent was already done, but confiding in the terror which his appearance seemed to diffuse, he pushed forward, and discerned by the glare of a torch which he carried the goodly rotund visage of Fra Biccocco, white and seething with alarm.

"In the name of the Five Wounds who art thou?" gasped the friar, after staring agape for several moments.

"It matters nothing to my purpose, father; lead me to the presence of Fra Bruno; my business is with him," replied the knight. "Is he well, or hath aught happened to him?"

"O worthy knight!—thou art not that devil in human form to break up so peerless a vessel of light as my dear master!—Holy Thomas Cantuariensis protect us!—but art thou here to do murder on that precious torch of theology?"

“Rather to save him from murderers—extinguishers, if thou wilt.—But whence came that villain who but now passed me?” returned the knight.

“From confession with my blessed brother, the ornament and glory of our order,” said the friar, breathlessly.

“If yonder assassin hath been with the good father, he is dead!” exclaimed the knight. “And this I tell you, who am the soldier of the cross who rescued the Jewess in the Ghetto.”

“Sancta Maria, mater Dei, ora pro nobis!—what have I done, a sinner, to merit this celestial honour!” said Fra Biccocco, kneeling before the astonished Hospitaller. “If it was St. Michael who saved that candle of the faith, as the villain swore, and thou art he—*probatum est*; ora pro nobis!”

“Thou art mad, friar; the villain’s fears have deceived him, or he has but fooled you to gain access to your master and slay him.—Doubtless he is even now weltering in his blood!” returned the knight, despite the horror of his suspicions almost laughing at his sudden canonization. “Lead me to him, I conjure thee—albeit, I fear all help will come too late!”

Ideas were never very fast arranging themselves in Fra Biccocco’s repertory, but this one was so clear and so emphatically stated that it dispelled in an instant his superstitious fancies, and convinced him that he was speaking to a form of flesh and blood like himself, although not so fat. Then the dread that his ornamental superior was murdered took

possession of his mind, and he trembled all over like a man in an ague fit, or rather like a jelly on a shaking sideboard. Quaking he stood and gazed with undiminished suspicion at the stranger, not daring either to take to flight or to remain. It was some minutes before the latter, by the most earnest protestations mingled with threats to his own personal damage, prevailed on Fra Biccocco to guide him to Bruno's cell—not knowing whether to behold a tragedy or to accelerate one.

The friar led the way with many a shuddering retrospect, being in great doubt whether it was not intended to stab him behind, through the central masses of ruin, beneath unnumbered shattered arches. Viewing the interminable alleys of pillars and colonnades and chambers which extended on either side, it seemed as if time alone could not have wrought that prodigious destruction—that an earthquake must have assisted. Once or twice they startled a sleeping goat in the aisles of the ruin, or an owl shot with a wild hoot over the monk's torch; else they encountered no living object to break the sepulchral desolation.

At length Fra Biccocco turned to the right beneath the remains of a triumphal portico, on each side of which stood the headless statues of two Roman emperors. Thence he entered into a wilderness of grottoes, the broad corridors of which were at times almost choked with odoriferous shrubs and wild flowers, which poured their generous sweetness on the desert around without stint or measure. He stopped at last at what probably had once been a

principal entrance to the baths, judging by the remains of the magnificent columns before it; ascended a flight of grass-grown steps, and entered a series of desolate chambers, which although roofless and choked with ruins and rank vegetation, bore traces of their ancient dedication. These terminated before a pile of archways ascending in various stages of ruin much higher than the surrounding masses, with an entrance secured by a very clumsily manufactured door. The friar pushed it hastily open, and admitted his companion into a chamber which had been one of the principal baths, but was now very singularly occupied, partly as a hermitage and partly as the studium of a philosopher. High unglazed holes admitted light and air together, and with the aid of the friar's torch and the dull reflection of a dying fire, revealed various apparatus of chemistry and anatomy, books, telescopes, and other learned instruments, oddly mingled with crosses, disciplines or scourges, rude drawings of the Virgin and saints, culinary implements, two beds or rather lairs of reeds, a block for a table, and two stools.

Without pausing to allow his companion time to note any minor details of the scene, Fra Biccocco crossed the chamber to an opposite door, opening which a square inclosure of ruins appeared. "Brother Bruno! brother Bruno! in mercy's name, if you are alive, speak!" exclaimed the friar, but no voice replied. "Oh, he is in Heaven!—he is in Heaven!" exclaimed the poor monk, sobbing at the thought as if his heart would break. "Ah, little thought I, and woe the hour, when he mounted those stairs to his

little cell, that he was only going so far on his way to the sky ! But at least spare me, good knight ; for now he is gone I am of no more significance than the shadow of a straw ! He was my teacher, my master, my prop, my glory, my light !—and now I am only a biscuit for a dog !”

“What stairs ?” returned the knight, snatching the torch, and throwing its light forward he perceived the remains of a flight of steps, overhung by laurel trees and juniper bushes, which ascended the ruins.

“His lamp is still burning, but he himself is blown out by the devil’s breath !” groaned the friar, looking up. “Mercy, mercy, signor cavaliero, on a poor Christian who does not know you, and has no longer any business on the earth !”

“There is blood on these steps indeed !” said the knight, passing the torch over some dark clots on the weeds which rankly clothed them.

“I remember me the bravo was badly wounded ; pray all the saints it be his blood—I would not grudge a sea of it !” returned the bewildered friar.

“Give me thy torch, I will learn : and if thou fearest for thine own safety, stay below,” said the Hospitaller, springing up the steps with a rapidity which soon placed him on a platform above, leaving Biccocco invoking all the saints in the calendar by name.

The ray of a torch streaming from a perforation in front guided Alfonso to the sanctum of Fra Bruno, but in his eagerness he nearly slipped down a chasm yawning in the way, before he perceived that it was necessary to take a slight detour to reach the chamber

in safety. He arrived immediately before a square opening from which the light came, and raising himself on tiptoe he looked into the chamber with almost the certainty knocking at his ribs that he was about to gaze upon a scene of horror.

But it was not so : it was a large chamber strewed with still more curious and cabalistical instruments than the vault below. About the middle was a table covered with books and writing materials ; and directly in front was an altar, decorated with singular taste, hung with magnificently embroidered velvet, and set with antique vases of great beauty full of flowers. A crucifixion, wrought in fine gold, hung above the altar, and before it knelt the monk, apparently whole and sound, but in such an ecstasy of devotion that it seemed as if a cannon discharged in the cell could scarcely have broken it. He was praying aloud, and partly in awe and partly in curiosity the Hospitaller listened ; and his prayer seemed to be a rhapsody of thanksgiving for the encouragement given him in overcoming all weakness of the flesh, and strength bestowed for some great task in hand. But it struck the Hospitaller chiefly that in the course of this rapt overflow he heard the name of Lucrezia more than once.

So mundane a word broke the spell ; but it was with a much increased confidence in the holy man whom he had thus beheld at unawares more devout than in the presence of his admirers, that Alfonso looked around for some entrance to the cell. This was easily found, for it was a narrow archway without a door, through which the Knight of St. John

boldly stepped, exclaiming as he appeared, "Your pardon and blessing, father! on one whose weighty business alone emboldens his interruption."

The Dominican started, glanced round, and sprang up, and for a moment his sallow cheek grew paler yet, and his right hand convulsively grasped the rope of his girdle, as if he had expected to find some weapon there. A spasmodic smile then crossed his lips, and folding his arms on his breast, and turning his eyes upward until all but the white disappeared, he said—"Strike!—since this is the only redemption Heaven can give my struggling soul—strike!"

"Do you then forget me, father? One of those travellers to whom you rendered a signal service at the falls of Velino, which he is rejoiced to have it now in his power to return," replied the knight in a reverential tone.

"Thou!—the Knight of St. John!—Art thou sent by heaven or by hell?" said Fra Bruno, starting at the voice from his attitude of fixed endurance, and darting a wild and glaring gaze at his visitor.

"Doubtless from Heaven, since I come to do service to so faithful a son of the church," returned Alfonso.

"Speak thy purpose then—or do it!" said the monk, with an agitation which the immediate apprehension of death had not caused him.

The Hospitaller judiciously replied by giving a brief account of the attempt at assassination which he had frustrated in the Ghetto, not, however, mentioning his suspicions of the instigator, to observe if the monk's consciousness would suggest that of his

dire enemy. As he spoke, a smile of bitter mirth stole over Fra Bruno's gloomy features.

"It was no armed angel, then, as worthy John of the Catacombs had nigh persuaded me—it was thou!" he exclaimed, with strange wildness. "Oh, now indeed am I shorn of my strength, and am at sea again in the tossing tempest of my thoughts! But believing, instead of murdering me he came to implore my forgiveness, and confess his crime, concealing only the name of his instigator, which yet I can freely guess, since it was not the fiend himself."

"And the bravo has confessed to you the crime he meditated against yourself!" exclaimed the knight, not without surprise, familiar as the marvellous workings of superstition were to all men in that age. "But what had you done against his prompter, who seemed to be a personage of high degree, that he should thirst for your blood?"

"He knows that I know him to be a devil—and he would have the world to think that he is a man," replied the Dominican, sedately.

"But, father, he seemed to be some irritated husband, accusing you of having caused a divorce—and impeaching your motives therein most blackly!" said the knight, continuing his scrutiny.

"A divorce?—but it is true!—and who that finds a canker worm in a matchless rose but would tear it out and crush it?" replied the monk, his pale complexion slightly mantling. "Yet, if I mistake not, the complainer was not that wretched thing whom you glorify by styling her husband! Signor, I acknowledge the offence with pride, and since you gaze

at me thus earnestly, I will add—but nay, the secrets of the confessional are sacred!—let it pass.”

“At least, then, it was not Alexander nor Cæsar who caused that first divorce,” mused the Hospitaller, whose suspicions, lightened in that direction, darkened against the monk. “But, father,” he continued, “it behoves you perchance to take some measures against the scandals which your enemy scatters, insinuating that your interference was prompted by an unholy passion for the wife whom you incited to throw off the yoke of—it might be—an ill-assorted marriage.”

“Ha!—and who will believe such a tale of an old bald-headed friar, skilled only in musty manuscripts, whose life hath been one long despair—and of a woman in the full flush and glow of youth and beauty, whose bosom pants for pleasure more restlessly than the golden seas of Italy to reach their sunny skies!” replied the Dominican, with a fearful kindling of the eye, and a hectic flame burning over his face.

“Nay, father, but it is known—whether women are, as their eulogists at times affirm, of a finer and more spiritual essence than ours; or whether, as a contrary sect misdoubt, their mental inferiority disposes them to an extravagant admiration of intellectual greatness;—certain it is that women have ever been more abjectly subject to its magic than men,” returned the subtle Hospitaller. “In such a love there were no guilt, but even a foretaste of the celestial calm of that in Heaven!”

“Ay, but the fire and clay are so closely kneaded in humanity—the dross and gold!—the soul is de-

based to the qualities of its earthy habitation; the immortal is enslaved by the mortal!" said the friar, with extreme bitterness. "Say what the Platonist may—man is more than half beast—and knows only that he is spirit too by discovering that there are infinite longings within him which his bestial enjoyments but mock with momentary glimpses of fulfilment! Yet the love of which thou speakest—spiritual and pure as the soul—might be eternal too as it!—might be the love of the blessed—were it returned!—But women—say what thou wilt of their reverence of mind—understand not love like this, or—yes, reverence!—they revere mind, but they love—carcass!"

"Yet they are happy who speak thus from observation—not experience," replied Alfonso, jealously concluding that it was jealousy which thus bitterly tinged the confessor's discourse.

"They only then of all creatures rational, if I may credit my experience, that have looked into the diseased heart of humanity with a mediciner's eye," said the Penitentiary, more calmly. "But this is not to the point:—it seems I owe you my life, and should thank you for it, nor will I tell you now how little I value it, lest you should deem that I would underrate the gratitude I owe."

"Speak not of gratitude, father, for I intend that you shall soon overpay me," returned Alfonso. "So violent a close would ill have fitted a life so calm and passionless as yours, which to a soldier were a natural climax."

"Thou deemest, then, there are no passions but

such as take outward forms of action?—None which like the Spartan's fox gnaw the heart beneath the mantle?" replied the Dominican, smiling gloomily. "No troubles of the mind only—no tempests of the soul? What if my calumniator spoke the truth—not of me—but of one in my place? Dost thou know what hell there might be even in the confidence and trust which the object of the unhallowed passion reposed—demonstrations of its hopelessness more certain than any language could bestow? Is it nothing, deemest thou, to make the lips ice-cold in a kiss of tranquil benediction when the heart is on fire?—To see a woman kneel at your feet before whose adorable beauty!—but men rave for the most part who talk out of their knowledge, and by your eyes I see that I do.—You said, my son, that it was in my power somewhat to repay you?"

"I said so, and—but I scarcely know how to shape my asking, so strange it is—but at least I may confide in your secrecy, father?" said Alfonso, who, with all his subtlety, scarcely knew how to commence what he desired to say.

The Dominican pointed emphatically to the crucifix on his altar, and after a short pause said mildly, "Speak, my son;—I listen, and none else on earth."

"Men say that you are profoundly skilled in casuistry, and learned in all doctrine, so that your words set the soul to rest on every controversy," began the Hospitaller, hesitatingly.

"Well, they say so—men say many things—this among the rest," said the friar, seemingly but little

flattered by the compliment. "To your purpose—for only time stands between men and eternity!"

"Then, father, I would know whether it is damnable for men to endeavour to ascertain matters which being known might tend to the destruction of the Church by destroying all reverence for its chief ministers and incarnations?" replied Alfonso.

The Penitentiary was for a moment silent, and a somewhat strange expression passed over his countenance.

"Truth is the rock on which the church is founded," he said at last. "Therefore the truth cannot harm her; therefore if the *truth* is sought—but what is that!—what is the truth!" he concluded, with singular wildness.

"Ay, that, father, is the point which you alone, of all mankind, perchance, can resolve me," returned the Hospitaller. "Listen to me, and I will expound myself under sanction of your promises.—I am the secret envoy of Alfonso of Ferrara, whose aversion to his sire's and the French king's project of wedding him to the daughter of the Borgias is so great, that I am in Rome solely to win for him some certain proof of the monstrous guilt laid to her charge, to excuse him in their eyes for refusing compliance. You, father, are the confessor of the illustrious lady;—if truth cannot harm the church, can certainties on this matter?"

The Penitentiary listened with profound attention, but on this sudden conclusion he glanced with astonishment at the questioner, and their eyes met in a

kind of concussion of thought from which both hastily withdrew them.

The monk made no direct reply, which indeed Alfonso scarcely expected; but a gleam of satisfaction lighted his visage as he said, after a short silence, "Strange, indeed!—But you have seen her, and do you persist in this your black errand?"

"Oh, she is fairer than the light; and could she but be cleared of the direful charges against her, Alfonso of Ferrara—it were not in humanity to resist such loveliness!" exclaimed the Hospitaller, involuntarily yielding to his enthusiasm.

"Indeed, indeed, I know not that!" replied the Dominican, hurriedly. "But know you not the obligations of the confessional, to which yet you have appealed, and hope that for less than a direct mandate from Heaven I will betray its secrets?"

"I am answered sufficiently in that refusal—to admit a negative were to break none of its laws," replied Alfonso, despairingly.

"A negative may affirm—I have replied nothing," said the confessor, much agitated. "Let us be very patient;—tell me, what are the accusations you bring against this youthful lady?"

"Not mine, father, but the whisperings which are heard all over Italy," replied the Hospitaller, shuddering at the impossibility which he felt of putting his suspicions into plain language. "They say that she hath fortunate lovers—whom she loves?" continued the knight, somewhat vacantly, in his embarrassment.

"She loves not—she never hath loved!" interrupted

Bruno, vehemently. "And for her lovers, it is false! This at least I may tell you—for who can doubt there is some dark power which surrounds her with an atmosphere of death and fatality?—Some secret and demoniac energy, which like a mandrake near a treasure blasts with its hidden poisons all who approach?"

"But the charm were broken if Donna Lucrezia weds the heir of the Orsini?" returned the Hospitaller.

"The marriage fixes her in Rome," replied the Dominican, with so dark a glance that it suddenly struck the Hospitaller he might be thus prompting and seconding his suspicions in dread of the alleged possibility of a change in the resolution of the Prince of Ferrara, contingent on the clearing up of his suspicions.

"But if the pontiff was sincere in his urgent proposals to Duke Hercules—he meant her to leave Rome for ever," he replied.

"And if the sky above us should fall—it would cover many an iniquity!" said the monk, hurriedly. "The Orsino himself has already escaped from a sharp hazard, albeit I know that Donna Lucrezia hath no manner of liking to him, and yields but to sway in this planned alliance."

"And he escaped partly by thine aid, father," returned the knight. "For certes thou art the Dominican friar who guided us to the cavern where Paolo Orsino was confined?"

Fra Bruno looked for a moment much disconcerted, but the certainty in the eye of his questioner was evidently not to be shaken.

“What if I admit so much—do not betray me to an irksome gratitude,” he replied. “The dark heavings of men’s consciences oft cast their secrets up to my ken.”

While Fra Bruno made this admission, aided by his new lights the memory of the Italian prince reverted with suspicion to the circumstance of the earnestness with which the monk had desired them to go to the monastery for assistance—where they had found the Duke of Romagna, with a force quite adequate to foil their intentions, and expose themselves to great hazard.

“I am answered merely if you tell me that Cæsar intended the destruction of his future brother, now that the necessity of his affairs so strongly prompt him to the alliance,” said Alfonso, with a deep throb of the heart.

“And this question I may not answer,” replied the Dominican.

“Albeit I tell you—what indeed it seems you know—that it was Cæsar himself who attempted your life to-night!” said the Hospitaller, thrown off his guard by his own vehemence.

“And didst thou know this, and—indeed, but thy master has chosen his envoy well!” returned Fra Bruno, evidently startled. “But as I have said, I cannot answer you on these points:—men are to judge only of men’s actions—God and His church of their intentions!”

“Yet at least in the matter of my theological doubt—” began Alfonso.

“Tempt me no more! I have made up my soul to

endure whatever may be rather than again—leave me—tempt me no more!” exclaimed the monk, with sudden wildness.

“I tempt you to no sin, but rather to a saintly work, redeeming perchance a limed soul from the snares of Satan!” returned the knight.

“Nay, if the devil come in an angelic form, who can resist him?” said Fra Bruno, in a voice full of the echoes of despair. “But hear me, and judge whether I am the oracle you deem me. Hear me—the great theologian, when I confess to you that I know not, in mine own labours, whether I am inspired by a god or a demon!—whether in exposing the abuses of Christianity I am not mining its whole fabric!—whether, instead of tidings of salvation, I am not scattering the seeds of damnation on all the winds!—whether I am a reformer or a destroyer!—whether my wages will be life or death!—whether the denunciation I intended to deliver to-morrow before assembled Christianity (since it seems I was saved by no miracle) be prompted by heaven or by hell!”

“They err not then that ascribe to you some taint of the heresies of Savonarola?” said the knight, despite his strong nerves shrinking a little back.

“Savonarola deserted Heaven, not Heaven Savonarola—a vessel too weak to endure the furnace!” replied the monk, kindling with enthusiasm, and continuing to speak in a rapt tone. “But who says that I lack signs to support me in my task? What if revenge first prompted, did not the dream visit me in my youth when my soul was pure? Is it not against every yearning of the flesh—every hope of earthly

recompense—in defiance of every temptation? Have I not been preserved to it by miracle this night—for 'tis not the less a miracle that is wrought by human agency? Is not my soul set at rest on its stormiest headland even by—evil that good may come! how is that?” he broke off as if awaking from a dream.

“Then, father confessor, you avow that you can give me no assistance in brightening the reputation of your beauteous penitent?” said Alfonso.

“Of what do ye accuse her?” returned the monk, with a piercing glance. “Is it that you expect me to swear that in an age so depraved, a court so corrupt, beneath skies like these of Italy, a woman more beautiful than all her sex is also more honest?”

“Nay, it would content me could you say that she is not more vile,” returned the Hospitaller, warmly.

“I am but little versed in the sex, and know not how to reply—a bookworm monk—what counsel can I give on such matters?” replied Fra Bruno, with a sardonic smile. “When you can tell me the limits of female wickedness, then I will tell you whether Lucrezia has passed them.”

“Then is it possible to be a thing more dire than these lines declare her,” said the Hospitaller, and glad to shroud his meaning under a language which, being dead, could not blush, he repeated the lines which it seemed haunted his memory—

“*Lucretia, nomine, sed re
Thaïs, Alexandri filia, sponsa, nurus.*”

“Thou hast seen Lucrezia—and thou believest in

these words?" said the monk, gazing with a strange eagerness and incredulity at his questioner.

"I have seen and believe them the more!" returned Alfonso, with at least equal anxiety.

"Why then"—said Fra Bruno, and he paused during one long moment in which the struggle of powerful passions rendered his usually calm visage absolutely fearful. "Why then—believe it still—and be content!"

The shock of lightning entering his frame could scarcely have vibrated more fearfully through every nerve of Alfonso than these terrible words, which confirmed his worst fears, from the confessor of Lucrezia Borgia. His emotion was visible to the monk, who, however, only turned coldly away, and said, "You saved my life—I have put you now in the way of the rewards due to a successful ambassador, from your munificent prince."

Alfonso endeavoured to summon energy to utter his thanks with composure, when luckily as he began to speak, an hysteric laugh of joy, mingled with sobs and exclamations of delight, startled them both. Fra Biccocco appeared crawling in at the doorway on his hands and feet, having at length summoned courage to ascend and learn the worst.

Quieting the emotion of his faithful attendant with a few words of rebuke, and satisfying his senses that he was alive and well, Fra Bruno turned to the Hospitaller and asked if he would accept such poor accommodation for the night as his hermitage afforded. "It were dangerous to pass the desert Aventine in

the dark, if this rogue has begun to unbeatify you, signor," he said, with a melancholy smile. "But I remember,—you are a soldier and must not know fear; and therefore stay to be my guard. I cannot indeed play the host, for I must to my interrupted toil, which will probably last me out the night-stars; but brother Biccocco is a much better convoy to good cheer than brother Bruno."

"And that is true enough, for of all the delicate cates sent us by Madonna Lucrezia, on occasion of to-morrow's blessed feast—" began the good friar, but Fra Bruno impatiently interrupted him by desiring him, before he went to rest, to bring him another lamp. Biccocco took the hint, and turned to guide the knight to the chamber below.

Not vainly had Fra Bruno vaunted the capabilities of his attendant; for the good man, once convinced that his guest was a creature of flesh and blood, bestirred himself anxiously to promote his comfort as such; but never was there a greater contrast than in the fat, loquacious, good-hearted and ignorant friar to his master. He talked incessantly, even when blowing the fire through a reed, chiefly descanting on the praises of his superior, but diversifying his talk with eulogiums of the viands which he set on the table. And in truth they were of an excellence and refined cookery which supported his assertion that all came from the kitchens and cellars of Donna Lucrezia.

Fra Biccocco's jubilate on the favour enjoyed by his master with Donna Lucrezia, confirmed by these abundant signs, did not much delight the hearer; and yet, by an amazing contradiction, it had become

almost a hope with him to discover that the Dominican had motives of jealousy to prompt his revelation to him in his character of envoy from the Prince of Ferrara. And thus for some time, instead of listening to Biccocco's discourse, he was lost in moody reverie; but at last the viands were ready, and the friar invited Alfonso to commence. He himself, with a sigh, began to eat a little bread and some onions, savouring the repast with water from an earthen pitcher, to which he set his lips with slight relish, and a woful glance at the Hospitaller's brimming tankard of wine.

"Nay, if you will not join me, I will join you, brother," said Alfonso, in his perplexity hoping that he might extract some ray of light from the friar's loquacity.

"Not so, brother; this is a vigil of the church, on which it behoves us to set the laity an example," replied the good monk, with a somewhat rueful look at his pitcher. "But you, who have no occasion to set yourself up as a light on a rock, drink while you are able, for no man drinks for ever; nor will you fill your cup from every brook with such stuff as you have there—wine of Chios, fruity as treacle, presented by my dear lady and princess, Donna Lucrezia, whose soul the saints keep in paradise when it goes there!"

"Nay, but you are host as well as monk—and what example do you set to your guest, scarce wetting your lips with that thin potation?" replied the knight. "Did not your superior as good as bid you join me in all lawful conviviality; moreover, this is

the eve of the jubilee, though it be Lent ; and I trust we have that share in our brother's fasting above to excuse our own ; and the wine is of a marvellous quality. So if thou wilt not pledge me, neither will I drink alone—a drunkard's not a merry companion's wont."

Thus pressed, Fra Biccocco could no longer refuse without being guilty of inhospitality—a sin at least equal to breaking a self-imposed fast. One quaff introduced that which followed ; and as the engrossing topic of the friar's mind was a devote admiration of the superior whom he attended, his talk ran all on that subject. Many curious particulars of the life and manners of the Dominican, whom he evidently looked upon as a man destined to be first pope, and then saint, did Fra Biccocco relate. And almost every anecdote he heard raised contrary doubts and opinions in the mind of Don Alfonso.

It seemed that Fra Bruno was believed to be a native of Spain, although his patronymic of Lanfranchi would seem to mark at least an Italian parentage. At all events he had resided for many years in that country, engaged it was thought in the study of physic, in which science the Moorish and Jewish schools of the south were then renowned, and which was still his favourite relaxation from his more profound theological pursuits. In the pursuit of the recondite mysteries of this art, and of its sister, chemistry, Fra Biccocco modestly intimated that he had always been of singular service to his superior ; and he dilated on his own knowledge in herbs and

minerals, and in the conduct of the operations of the science. Wonderful in their nature were many of these, as Fra Biccocco averred, rising to fill the knight's tankard (which he shared) for the fourth time.

Biccocco related that it was in the midst of mundane studies like these, while yet young, and fast acquiring an universal renown by his attainments, that Fra Bruno was seized with a profound disgust for the world, and became a monk. Several subsequent years he spent in wandering in remote and heathen lands, spreading the tidings of salvation, until, as the good friar declared, he received an extraordinary call, to the effect, as he more mysteriously hinted, that he was destined to turn the church from divers great errors into which she had fallen, and which else threatened her destruction. During the time of Savonarola's mission in Florence he had been one of his most zealous and fervent disciples; and so far from being daunted by the disastrous fate of his chief, and the dispersion of his sect, he came to Rome itself, and commenced the promulgation of similar doctrines. Fortunately, to save him from the consequences of this daring, it pleased Our Lady that at this time Donna Lucrezia, being oppressed with sorrow on account of her unhappy union with the Lord of Pesaro, went to him as to a saint on earth for advice and religious consolation. Shortly followed the divorce, and the appointment of Fra Bruno to the office of confessor, to the great wrath of half a dozen loftier pretendants.

Alfonso thought that there might have been as much policy as piety in this arrangement, for Biccocco unguardedly acknowledged that the duties of his new office took up so much of his time that the friar discontinued his public arraignment of abuses. But he frequently attempted to resign it; and finding that his entreaties were disregarded, and upbraided in his conscience by his neglect of the duties of his call, he finally determined to withdraw himself from Rome, in secret, and he undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Biccocco accompanied him on this long and dangerous voyage, the perils and sufferings of which he related at great length, perpetually eulogizing his master's patience and saint-like indifference to every toil and hazard. They wandered a long time in Syria and Palestine, making many proselytes, and comforting the little congregations of Christians scattered over those infidel countries. In the course of these perambulations again the Dominican received a call back to his neglected work of reformation, and hurried back to Italy, arriving in Rome amidst the rejoicings which celebrated the marriage of Donna Lucrezia with her second husband, the Prince of Salerno. The catastrophe, however, which so shortly followed turned all her thoughts again to devotion, and much to the annoyance of the Dominican she sought him out personally to entreat him to resume his office. Biccocco was present at the scene, and he minutely detailed his master's steady refusals and the urgent supplications of his penitent; but what principally struck Alfonso was, that the ascetic reproached her with her marriage as with a crime on which the

vengeance of Heaven had fallen. But finally his obstinacy was overcome by the submission and entreaties of the lady ; but he had not desisted from his labours, and the number of his disciples was daily increasing. Among these Alfonso found that something extraordinary was expected to happen on the following day, when the Penitentiary was to preach before the jubilants in St. Peter, an honour which was obtained for him by Lucrezia. But it was not doubted that he would take the opportunity, at whatever risk, to promulgate his reforming doctrines before the assemblage of the Christian world.

Time wore away in this long discourse, and it was with a start that the friar heard the remote bell of a monastery toll midnight. He apologized to Alfonso for keeping him so long awake when he was doubtless weary and desired to rest. "'Tis the better fault of two," replied the Hospitaller. "But methinks I should not have been less inclined to sleep if I had been at conversation with Apollo and all the muses."

Fra Biccocco laughed jollily at this compliment, and busied himself with renewed zeal in arranging the rushes which were to receive the honour of the guest's pressure. When this was performed to his satisfaction, he was about to betake himself in peace to his own heap, when Alfonso reminded him of the lamp which his superior had desired him to renew. The friar thanked him heartily, rinsed his mouth of the fume of the wine, and taking a jar of oil, disappeared with a somewhat wavering step.

He returned in a few minutes. "If ever mortal

saint were lifted up in the air by intense devotion, my beloved master is now," he exclaimed. "He heard me no more than if I had been a ghost, though I had the misfortune to stumble and spill a good deal of oil, not to mention the sputtering of the flame as I poured it into his lamp. Oh, benedicite! —were it not for his sanctity being over us, I should no more dare to close mine eyes under these mountains of ruin than an owl in the Corso on a feast day."

CHAPTER III.

THE JUBILEE.

“Unless to Peter’s chair the viewless wind
Must come and ask permission when to blow,
What further empire would it have ? for now
A ghostly Domination, unconfined
As that by dreaming Bards to Love assigned,
Sits there in sober truth.”

WORDSWORTH.

THE morning of the Jubilee dawned ;—and it was the distant roar and merriment of cannon and bells announcing the dawn of the great day which startled the Hospitaller from a profound but dream-haunted sleep.

The first object he beheld was his kindly host, Biccocco, who was boiling milk, and at the same time grilling a fowl split in halves over the fire. Alfonso could scarcely forbear laughing at the profound gravity with which he performed this operation, as if it was the most important in which man could be engaged. Observing him stir, the friar looked round, and informed him that Fra Bruno had already gone to join the procession of his order,

leaving word that the knight should not be disturbed. Alfonso uttered some words of moody thanks, and while Biccocco put the breakfast in more active preparation, he sallied forth from the ruins to bathe in the lucid stream which flows near them. As he went he was struck with the change which daylight produced on those extraordinary remains, so dismal and funereal by night. Millions of flowers of the most beautiful colours bloomed in every crevice in the deserted chambers, on the summits of the aerial arches, around the fallen columns, and filled the air with fresh and dewy perfumes. Birds of sweet note sung on every bough; the dark cypresses became pyramids of verdure shooting into the silvery sky; the slopes of the hills on each side seemed no longer desolate; their ruins inhabited them.

Discontented with himself and all things, still the balmy freshness of the sweet air somewhat soothed Alfonso's irritation; and when he returned to breakfast with Biccocco he had regained calm enough to observe the agitation of the poor monk. To his inquiries into the cause for some time Biccocco returned evasive replies, but at last he confessed that he apprehended his master would make some great outbreak of holy indignation, which would bring his friends into trouble, despite the potent favour of Donna Lucrezia. He had gone out fasting, announcing as much to his faithful attendant, by advising him not to be of his company on that day. But Biccocco declared, with tears bubbling over his jolly eyes, that he had no doubt a visible miracle would be performed in his superior's behalf, if he incurred

danger, and therefore he should hasten to join him as soon as breakfast was dispatched.

A thought beamed in upon Alfonso that it was his knowledge of the dangerous designs of the Penitentiary, in a political sense, which had incited Cæsar to the attempt on his life. And if Fra Bruno really intended to enter into an open war with the papal court, was it not certain that he could have no motive of jealousy to actuate his revelation of the previous night? So important had the solution of this point become to Alfonso, that, but that he remembered his compact with the young Jewess, he would have accompanied Biccocco. But feigning some excuse, he parted with him where the road to the Forum branched off, the good monk bestowing on him his benediction, and a branch of consecrated palm.

It was, however, with great doubt that Miriam would or could keep her appointment that the Hospitaller made his way to the Forum, in which he had agreed to meet her. It was not probable that her memory, which confounded impressions so much more vivid, would retain one so evanescent. Moreover, now that he imagined he had attained the certainty of Lucrezia's guilt, the rest seemed merely matter of idle curiosity. And when he arrived in the Forum, or Ox Market as it had come to be called, the prodigious multitudes which already began to swarm—multitudes of every land and costume,—among whom the Romans themselves by their paucity seemed to be the foreigners,—he began almost to wish that she might have forgotten the plight.

He took his station for some time on a conspicu-

ous point—a sort of mound of accumulated ruins and rubbish, on which were three solitary columns, supporting a broken capital. A gorgeous dream of the magnificence of ancient Rome, conjured up even by the ruins around, for a time diverted his darker visions. The broad space was bounded by the towers of the Capitol on one hand, on another by the distant majesty of the Colosseum, showing its massive ruins far above the tallest trees; the Palatine lay before him covered with the stupendous remains of the palaces of the Cæsars, temples and arches crowning every steep, and hiding their decay in the golden mists which were but just rising under the glow of day; and the diversified masses of the passing crowds banished the sense of silence and desolation, usually so oppressive when it is that left by the departure, not the mere absence of man.

But in vain did the Hôspitaller await his damsel with a lover's impatience; and still more vainly did he mingle with the festal throngs in search of her. The hopelessness of his expectations at last occurred to him so strongly, as time wore on, that he resolved to go to the Ghetto, and under pretence of purchasing some drugs, (for he recollected that the house belonged to an apothecary,) ascertain if there was any possibility of reminding Miriam of her promise.

He hastened, therefore, to the Ghetto; but on reaching the first gate, he learned that no Christian was to be allowed to enter, nor Jew to leave it, during the whole week of the Jubilee, with the exception

of those who, according to custom, were to run a foot-race to divert the populace—an indignity which is now commuted into paying the expenses of one of horses, which takes place annually during the carnival.

The knight's anxiety for the safety of Miriam returned, and it was with some vague intention of venturing into the Ghetto by the strange means he had left it on the previous night, that he strayed down the Marsh to the archway of the stream. To his surprise he found the waters rushing out in such volume that they filled the archway, and rendered any attempt at entering by it impossible. This circumstance made him suspect that the Hebrews had discovered his visit, and increased his anxiety, while it deprived him of all means of satisfying it.

Much time had been wasted in these researches ; and fearing lest he should be too late to witness the opening splendours and portents of the Jubilee, Alfonso joined the masses which were now sweeping towards the Vatican.

It was in the antique cathedral of Constantine that the grand mass of the Jubilee was to be celebrated ; but vast as was its extent, only a part of the pilgrims could be contained, and the gates were thrown open to allow the great multitude which filled the square of St. Peter to share the benefits, and some of the glories of the spectacle. His great strength and religious attire enabled the Hospitaller to cross these masses, and to enter the basilica. The interior presented a scene of extraordinary magnificence, for the

wealth and ostentation of the Borgias made this last jubilee of Christian unity the most gorgeous—like the glories around the setting sun.

The cathedral, crumbling under the weight of twelve centuries, its ruinous fissures concealed by hangings of precious woofs, in a manner typified the faith of which it was the arena. But unbounded was the reverence with which it was regarded by all Christendom, for it was still supported on pillars whose foundations the first Christian emperor had laid, and beneath its pavement reposed the ashes of the glorified founder of the papacy, of the saint who had seen and conversed with the divinity in human form.

A brilliant sun illuminated the vast area of the pile, and revealed its extent by lighting up innumerable remote altars, all glistening with gold plate, emblazoned canopies, jewelled shrines, and the most valued relics of various saints and founders of orders, each attended by its deputation, often from distant countries, set forth with every decoration of gold and precious stones which could evince their own veneration, and win the gaze of the people. But the grand altar, in the centre of the middle aisle, attracted all attention. It was raised upon a circular platform, carpeted with cloth-of-gold, and, to believe the whispers that circulated, was itself of the same ore, most skilfully ornamented with precious stones, which blazed forth the name of Jesus, and various personifications of Christianity. It was canopied by a pavilion of cloth-of-gold still more lustrously gemmed, beneath which was the tabernacle of the Host, on which

indeed every dazzling power of the goldsmith's and jeweller's art had been exhausted, and which blazed like a noonday sun.

The principal pomp of the spectacle was yet wanting, the pontiff and his court being still in the Vatican, receiving the congratulations of the jubilants, and their homage. But while surveying the preparations, Alfonso found that he was himself an object of notice; a page who had been listlessly wandering about, no sooner saw him than he darted forward, and respectfully inquired if his name was the Lord Alfonso of Ravenna, that which the prince had assumed to misdirect curiosity from his own. He replied in the affirmative, but before he could demand the page's reason for his inquiry, he had bounded away, as if in great satisfaction. In a few minutes after the knight beheld Burchard advancing towards him.

"The most holy father commands you to his presence, sir knight," he said briefly. "Follow me."

Waving his silver wand with great dignity he passed on, and never doubting but that the cavalier would follow him on wings, looked not back until he had almost reached a door which opened into the Vatican. But hearing no sound of voice or footfall he turned his head, and perceived that the knight still stood as if rooted to the ground. Imagining that he had not perceived that he spoke to him, the dean beckoned to him authoritatively; and the hesitation of the instant passed, Alfonso obeyed.

The grandeur of the Borgian taste, and the dawn of a new age which was to unite all the glories of

the arts, were visible at every step through the palace which Alfonso traversed. But he was scarcely surprised with the magnificence he beheld, until arriving at a line of gilded porphyry pillars which descended by a flight of marble stairs to the vast hall in which Alexander sat enthroned, he commanded a view of a spectacle so extraordinarily superb, that it was with difficulty he prevented himself from uttering an exclamation. A continual procession of jubilants, lay and clerical, in gorgeous costumes, were passing before the pontiff's throne, kissing his feet in homage, and offering their congratulations, and then joining the magnificent crowd which was stationary behind the throne. Even as the Hospitaller entered he remarked an unwont and, truth to say, scandalous spectacle in an ecclesiastical court. Lucrezia, attended by a retinue of young and beautiful ladies, was at the moment kneeling before the pontiff, to receive his benediction; and whether in bravery, or refutation of opinion, he raised her in his arms, and kissed her with extreme tenderness. Burchard gave a deep sigh, though probably because the presence of a female at all was out of all precedent; and Lucrezia, turning to take a place which seemed assigned to her on the right of the throne, suddenly encountered the eyes of Don Alfonso. She started, and a scarlet tint instantly overspread her blooming complexion, succeeded by waxen paleness; and Alfonso advanced without again raising his eyes.

It was not without strong inner emotion that he

approached the throne under the gaze of so many eyes, which seemed all fixed on him as on an object of great curiosity. But as he came, Lucrezia recovered her self-possession; her beauty lit up with an expression of sparkling joy and welcome, its roseate hues all deepened, and her sweet eyes were aglow with an emotion which, in spite of all her efforts, wet their long lashes with tears. The warm and melting nature of the south predominated over every habit of female dissimulation; and it was with the most undisguised and rapturous delight, that as the knight knelt at the foot of the pontifical throne, she exclaimed—"He is here! Holy father! if my life be of any value, behold the matchless chevalier to whom I owe it!"

"*Oscula pedes beatos beatissimi Patris!*" whispered Burchard to Don Alfonso, who mechanically obeyed by mounting the steps of the throne, and kneeling at the pontiff's feet, which he kissed.

"Rise and let us embrace you, valiant Cid! for Ruy Diaz el Campeador hath few achievements in his chronicle which surpass thine of the buffalo," said Alexander, placing his jewelled hands on the warrior's shoulders. "Moreover, we owe thee it seems a share in our good son, Paolo's redemption! Therefore, name what recompense thou wilt that is in our power to grant, and Christendom shall see if we are not as grateful for services as resentful of evil entreatment!"

"Holy father! men are neither rewarded nor punished for the accidents of which they are unwitting

agents, good or bad," replied Alfonso, with a stern gravity which obviously surprised all within hearing, for even this warmth of gratitude struck him in an evil light. "Wherefore the only recompense which I demand is to have none imputed to me in this matter—for, indeed, the atoms of Epicurus came not together more fortuitously than my steed and lance between the magnificent lady, your holiness's niece, and the enraged bull at Nepi."

"But I aspire to owe you gratitude, knight, for a favour which valour, not chance, must bestow," said Lucrezia, blushing still more exquisitely beautiful as she stepped towards Alfonso, and taking a silvery scarf from her neck, threw it lightly over his shoulders. "In the approaching tournament, that I may assure myself of the prize, noble Hospitaller, I name you my knight."

Alfonso's heart throbbed, and his cheek flushed, and he was probably about to give way to a mastering impulse; but, at the moment, his eye encountered a pair fixed upon him in the cowl of a monk with a glare like that of some wild animal in a cave. He recognized Fra Bruno, and the sudden tide of recollections came into concussion with the feeling, and strong as it was, repelled it.

"August lady!" he replied, drawing off the scarf, which clung to the rivets of his armour; "as you may well perceive, it is not permitted me to contend for the smiles of earthly beauty. But to win the crown for the shrine of Our Lady of Purity in Ferrara I will venture me as far as may be;—whereby all women shall owe me thanks, that show thereby how

infinitely I esteem the celestial chastity and modesty of which Our Lady is exemplar, and which are the supreme ornaments of their sex ; without which, indeed, I hold all beauty as a lure of Satan, poison in a golden vase, rottenness swathed in cloth of gold !” And, as he spoke, finding that the scarf was still caught in his armour, he clutched it away so impatiently that he tore it into several strips.

Those who beheld the countenance of Lucrezia Borgia as the Hospitaller spoke could scarcely follow, even in thought, the rapid alternation of emotions which troubled its beauty. But after the instant’s pause of astonishment which held the whole presence, an expression of pride and defiance subdued that of extreme shame and anguish. Her rosy mouth shone with a smile of scorn, her eyes lightened, her cheeks crimsoned, and snatching the scarf which the knight presented on his knee, she turned to the surrounding nobles.

“ Ladies were not wont to be thus denied, in the days of Carlo Magno or of King Arthur, Messer Bembo !” she said, observing the canon. “ How did Boiardo learn his fair tales of love and courtesy in Ferrara ? But if they be not forgotten legends over all Italy, I trust I shall find some knight who will essay to win the prize for me—were I even the reverse of our blessed Lady of Purity—whose knight we cannot own this holy warrior to be, until she hath avowed him by giving his lance the victory.”

“ The gentleman is from Ferrara, lady, ’tis true,” replied Bembo, half smiling and yet very much confused. “ But your grace should be informed that ’tis

a Ferrarese proverb that he who may not eat the peach should not smell at it—and the Knights of St. John are but monks in steel.”

“Deign to bestow this precious silk on me, lady!” said Paolo Orsino, kneeling, and kissing it with passionate enthusiasm. “And in a gentle and loving pass of arms I hope to convince this gentleman, my friend, that the prize of earthly beauty should go where the consent of mankind would place it, not where only angels should pretend to challenge its setting.”

“In you, Signor Paolo, this were an enforced devoir. I will name none my knight but he who brings me the crown,” said the lady, biting her bright lip. “But, Knight of England! I would fain count your lance among my hopes?”

Starting from an attitude of gloom in which he had been listening, Sir Reginald’s face beamed over with joy; and kneeling, he swore so vehemently by St. George that he would strive to win her the wreath as long as he could sit in saddle or couch spear, that Lucrezia smiled upon him with a tenderness which heightened his enthusiasm almost to rapture, and infused a new feeling into Don Alfonso’s breast. Innumerable voices now declared the same intention.

“Nay, but let us not deprive some worthier lady of her champion,” said Lucrezia, glancing with a mixture of triumph and sadness around. “We know not why indeed Our Lady of Purity should be thus as it were set in contest and contrast with us; but that none of you may fear her aidance against us, if the wreath be mine I will win it only as an offering

to the shrine of Our Lady of the Jubilee, to whom we mean to dedicate a chapel on the spot where we escaped—by *chance*—from a buffalo.”

“Ay, ’tis not so easy to win the crown of a tournament as to frighten a bullock,” said Cæsar, marking with satisfaction the gloom on his sire’s brow. “But your paternity may remember that time presses.”

“Knight, thou art not half, but wholly a monk!” exclaimed Alexander, with evident displeasure. “At thy years it had been easier for me to have won ten tournaments, than to have refused one such request from a dame so beautiful!” And he glanced with pride and affection on his fair daughter, darkening when he marked her emotion. He then nodded impatiently to the master of the ceremonies, who, with his wand, motioned to the Hospitaller to pass behind the throne, and to those beyond to continue their homage.

The stupendous form of Vitellozzo now appeared, and the clash of his armour, as he knelt, rang through the hall.

“The lord of Città di Castello!” exclaimed the pontiff with evident astonishment, and withdrawing his foot as if he meant to spurn the giant with it.

“In all humility and devotion, here, to kiss the blessed feet,” said Vitellozzo, in a tone in which awe struggled with habitual hardihood.

“This is too insolent, Lords Orsini, if it is ye have brought this man to mock us with his homage before a throne from which he threatened to thrust us!” exclaimed Alexander, turning with vehemence to those nobles.

“Nay, holy father, it was at my entreaty and advice, since we are all to be brothers henceforth,” replied the Duke of Romagna, with his tart smile.

“Holy father ! I pray you but to show me what I must do to win your pardon ?” said Vitellozzo, whom his ingrained superstition, which was part and parcel of his very rebelliousness, and the silence of the Orsini, much discomfited.

“Disband thy German thieves—and let thy vassals learn there are other duties for Christian men than obeying the licentious commands of their lord against his own,” returned Alexander passionately, and rising from his seat, while Vitellozzo also rose with a low hoarse laugh from his knees, and retreated sullenly among the Orsini.

The duke glanced sorrowfully at Paolo Orsino as his irritated sire resumed his seat, with an angry frown at the whole group, and the ceremonial proceeded, hastened by the visible impatience of the pontiff—was at length concluded, and then the whole court was marshalled in procession to proceed to St. Peter’s.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SERMON OF THE JUBILEE.

Prometheus.—"Venerable mother !
All else who live and suffer take from thee
Some comfort ; flowers, and fruits, and happy sounds,
And love, though fleeting ; these may not be mine,
But mine own words, I pray, deny me not."

SHELLEY.

UNWILLING to share the observation which would attend those who followed in the procession, Alfonso glided out of the palace into the temple, and took up a remote station at a shrine in one of the cross aisles. The tolling of unnumbered bells and the thunder of artillery soon announced the approach of the papal procession ; but some time before it appeared a gorgeous chaunt was remotely audible, mingling in that of the cathedral choirs with a sweet and melancholy effect, as if the heavens had opened, and the distant harmony descended from angelic voices. At the point where he stood the procession appeared to Alfonso one moving mass of glitter and sumptuous colour, as the sun streamed down upon it along the cross-aisle which it traversed. The rich copes of the ecclesiastics, stiff with gold and gorgeous

brocade, the jewelled mantles of the nobles, the polished breastplates and tasselled spears of the guard, passed in a confusion of splendour. But Alfonso easily recognized the pontiff, borne in his gilded chair, under a superb canopy, surrounded by a crowd of bishops, his episcopal cope and tiara glittering all over with jewels, and extending his hands in benediction as he advanced to the kneeling myriads.

An infinite array of officials followed; and then came the pilgrims of the highest rank, each nation marching in separate masses, in the most sumptuous and various costumes. Then followed an endless procession of the different orders of monks and nuns, the former carrying torches, the latter lighted tapers, albeit the sun flamed down the aisles in blazing cataracts. After these fraternities and sisterhoods came Lucrezia with her court, Cæsar, his wife, and their retinue. Alfonso discerned that Lucrezia walked between the Orsino and Le Beaufort, and for the first time he noticed the peculiar magnificence of the latter's garb. It is true that the handsome English knight had always been conspicuous for the pomp of his garniture, but on this occasion he surpassed himself. Even the Orsino, whose taste was naturally to sombre colours, was now arrayed like a kingly bridegroom, had he looked the character more cheerfully.

Cæsar was habited in red satin and gold brocade, powdered all over with large diamonds and pearls: his ducal cap was encircled with three rows of jewels, conspicuous among which were seven rubies, "of the bigness of large beans," as a cotemporary record declares. His breast glittered like the shield of the

magician Atlante, with so brilliant a lustre that it was scarcely possible to look at it more steadily than at the sun. Even his boots were of fretted gold-work, and the spurs shone on the pavement with the sparkles of gems. His magnificent mantle, which it was noted was of imperial purple lined with ermine, and borne by ten barons of high rank, a gorgeous sword, and the insignia of many illustrious orders of knighthood, completed his splendour.

After this blaze all that followed seemed poor, although the immense procession continued to pass as glorious as rich stuffs and banners and jewels and pomp of bearing could make them; or the darkening of the knight's fancies, and the clouds of incense which arose, made it appear to him as if the dun of evening had suddenly fallen over all that coloured magnificence which had set the air alight as it went. Nevertheless he joined in the line of the procession, when he considered it sufficiently remote from the chief personages, and was drifted by chance, and almost against his will, to a station opposite to Lucrezia's.

And now arose the ocean-like chaunt of measured and harmonious voices; and the pontiff, descending from his throne, proceeded to officiate as high-priest in the august solemnity. Come with what prejudices men might, it was not in humanity to resist the impressions of overwhelming awe produced by the magnificence of the spectacle, and the sublime recollections with which the solemnity in every stage was associated. The majestic person, and great but unbent age of Alexander, when not contradicted by the

fire and impatience of his eye and occasional gesture, supported all the venerableness and dignity of a Pontifex Maximus; and when at the conclusion of the mass he bestowed his benediction on all Christendom, the Knight of St. John was kneeling with the immense masses—perhaps as well convinced as the most enthusiastic pilgrim there, that he was receiving a blessing direct from heaven.

The paroxysm only subsided when, raising his head, Alfonso beheld Fra Bruno, attended by a number of Dominicans of his order, mount a richly carved pulpit fixed in one of the immense pillars. He carried with him a parchment sealed with lead, supposed to be the Bull of Indulgences, which was impatiently expected by the pilgrims.

Throwing back his cowl, the severe Spanish features of the friar were seen, pale but composed, like one brought forth to suffer some terrific punishment, but who despised its terrors. There was a short silence, during which the Romans communicated the name and reputation of the Penitentiary to their foreign guests. Gazing at him, Alfonso felt assured that no failure in his courage need be anticipated; and he mused with bitter satisfaction on the astonishment and discomfiture which the papal court was about to sustain. Fra Bruno, however, did not read the bull, seeming to reserve it for a *bonne bouche* after the harangue which he was to pronounce.

The sermon was delivered in Latin, which was still the common language of Europe; and it was such as for some time amply answered Alfonso's expectations. The preacher began with a truly terrific picture of the

state of society and religion throughout the Christian world, which he delineated with such Dantesque gloom and horror, that but for his arabesque entanglement and gorgeousness of imagery it might have been thought that the poet of hell had returned to describe earth in colours taken from its murkiest depths. But with all the fantastic convolutions of his reasoning the fervour of a real eloquence began to overflow the twisted fountains in which the scholastic rhetoric of the day usually confined its displays. These qualities Fra Bruno specially exhibited when, describing the dawn of the pure light of Christianity in which the gods of paganism vanished like phantoms, he declared that they were once more deified on earth, and the light all but extinguished. Treating the antique divinities as personifications of human passions and lusts, his eloquence took the most various and terrible tints, and considering the nature of some of the crimes which he thus delineated and anathematized, many began to perceive personal applications of a hideous nature. None more than the Hospitaller.

After this exordium the ascetic friar drew a contrast of the state which he declared would be the fulfilment of the ideal of Christianity, and the dreams of stoic or Spartan legislator never presented a sterner vision of human duties and existence. It seemed as if his words, like the lava overflow of a volcano, withered all that was green and flowery in their way. The universe, in his desponding eloquence, seemed but a vast desolation—space itself the destined arena of immeasurable sadness;—all the beautiful illusions which

the magic of the passions bodies forth withered beneath his touch into the phantoms which perhaps they are. The vanity of hope, the hollowness of success, the bitterness which mingles in the most nectareous draughts of glory, and love, and triumph—he painted in powerful colours, to contrast with the marble calm of that form of stoicism which he called religion. Thence he passed into a still more terrific delineation of the morals and manners of the clergy.

The astonishment and even fear of the great assembly every moment increased. But as the attack dealt only as yet in generals, Alexander seemed to listen to it even with satisfaction. A singularity remarked in the character of this pontiff by all his historians, and which by some has been considered as proof of a nature not originally evil, was his love of virtue in the abstract. He himself was frequent in resolutions and recommendations to reformation, which his violent passions, ambition, and perhaps the necessities of his dangerous supremacy, had always frustrated.

The duke listened to Fra Bruno's declamation with a livid satirical smile, as if it diverted him, and occasionally he pointed the invectives of the friar by nodding at those who were supposed to be guilty of the crimes alleged, as if to call upon them to notice that they were assailed.

Some terrible climax to this extraordinary harangue seemed in preparation. Fra Bruno himself paused like one collecting all his energies for a dreadful feat. It was at this moment that rolling his eyes around the assembly, as if to gather all their attention

—his glance fell upon Donna Lucrezia. She was gazing at the Hospitaller in such absorption, that she seemed not even to observe the silence.

The words which Fra Bruno had begun to form died away on his lips, his large chest heaved with a convulsive breathing,—and again he was silent. Lucrezia started as if awaking from a dream, and she glanced up at the friar in astonishment. He began to speak once more, but it was in an altered, wandering tone, which for some time had little or no connexion with his subject, nor was it perceptible by what means he introduced a very different topic—his own preservation on the previous night. Something he spoke in general about the Jubilee—about mercy—and then of this signal one granted to himself; and he related minutely his escape from the designs of certain masked assassins. The Hospitaller heard, with astonishment at the imprudent gratitude of the monk, the commendations which he lavishly bestowed upon him; and almost feared that he would divulge his suspicions of the instigators of the crime.

Lucrezia could not suppress her tears, and a general murmur of applause arose, despite the sacredness of the time and place; when it subsided, Fra Bruno was audible, continuing his narrative with increased vehemence, bordering on wildness. But far from imputing the attempt to its real planner, it almost seemed that he hinted at the Orsini, in declaring that from the discourse of the assassins it appeared that their wrath was excited against him by his known disapprobation of an alliance projected by

two mighty houses. In defiance of this frenzied revenge, Fra Bruno solemnly announced, that he continued in the belief and declaration that, after the two tremendous judgments in which heaven itself had condemned the hopes of nuptial happiness, in one of the contracting parties, further to tempt its wrath were to bring down the lightning directly on the heads of the offenders! No reason for this opinion did he give beyond the prophetic and oracular tone in which he uttered it, and which was distinctly heard amidst all the mutter which arose throughout the basilica.

Various was the effect of this extraordinary announcement. The pontiff glanced wrathfully and suspiciously at Cæsar, who sat smiling, as if he imagined this was his work; the Duke of Gravina started up, and laid his hand on his dagger, tossing his grey hair from his flashing eyes, but Paolo drew him back, and in a whisper implored him not thus to point the insinuation of the bribed and malignant confessor. Lucrezia, however, made no effort to conceal her confusion, but covered her face with both hands; while the Hospitaller's imagination filled up the dark void which the monk's silence left, on the reasons which induced him to anathematize an union with a wretch so guilty.

Gliding dextrously from his dangerous subject, Fra Bruno pronounced a public forgiveness of his enemies, for,—remembering no longer his first terrible analysis of religion,—he declared that its essence was love. And now, indeed, did the extraordinary friar become eloquent!—it was amazing

with what unnatural but surpassing ingenuity he transferred the attributes of an intellectual operation into those of a sensual passion—religion into love—with the fervid alchemy of his Spanish imagination. So warmly eloquent waxed his discourse, that the voluptuous glow returned to Lucrezia's complexion, and a deeper chill to Alfonso's; but it was remarkable that, even in one of his most splendid flights, Fra Bruno abruptly checked himself—and with a deep groan he snatched up the Bull, tore off its leaden seal, and read it in a strangely altered, loud, and discordant voice.

A few moments of devote silence followed, and the Penitentiary was expected to kneel and utter a prayer of thanksgiving. But he stood motionless; and after waiting for some short time, Alexander coldly observed to some attendants, "Go and see what ails the disciple of Savonarola—and we will say the *Gratias* ourself!" and rising, he returned to the altar, with the accustomed retinue of cardinals and prelates, and chaunted the thanksgiving with a voice of the harmonious volume and power of an organ-pipe. At the conclusion the Duke of Romagna approached the altar, alone, demanded permission to make his duteous offering, and, instead of gold, emptied a casket of precious gems on the platform.

"'Tis a most princely and regal benefaction!" exclaimed the Datary, in delight. "A most illustrious exemplar!"

"Charlemagne gave more!—but when I come like him to receive the crown of the West, so will I!" replied

the duke, smiling, amidst a general stare of amazement. But the example was immediately followed, and in a few minutes the altar was heaped around with presents of extraordinary magnificence and value—offerings from nearly all the sovereigns, states, nobles, great cities, and commonalties of Europe. Sacks of gold and silver were emptied out, jewels, crucifixes, relics, necklaces, cloths of gold, rich embroideries, tapestries, amber, pearls, strange productions of the newly discovered world, gold-dust, ivory, rare spices, all the most precious commodities of the remote lands from which the pilgrims came, in return for which each received a branch of consecrated palm from the hands of the Datary, whose keen eyes glistened almost as brightly as the treasures whose receipt he thus acknowledged.

Meanwhile drums beat, trumpets sounded, and the guards discharged their pieces in the square outside, answered by remote peals of ordnance, while within the basilica the organs of the various chapels poured down the aisles torrents of melody which joined into one mighty flow, and the vast multitude within and without joined the ecclesiastics in the magnificent notes of a *Gloria in Excelsis*. Alfonso's gaze was still, however, attracted towards the Dominican's pulpit, from which he beheld him descend, pale, dazzled, and staggering, as if under the influence of a sunstroke, and leaning on the shoulder of Biccocco. But at this moment a terrific event turned away the Hospitaller's attention, and absorbed it. The great bell of the basilica was

tolling to celebrate the Jubilee, and the agitation of the air produced by so many sounds shook the vast and ruinous piles so violently, that a prodigious mass of iron, which formed one of the clappers of the bell, fell from the belfry in its skyey spire, and dashing with irresistible weight through every obstruction, reached the ground at the very feet of the pontiff, crushing a deep hole in the pavement, and throwing a million pieces of shattered marble over himself and his attendants.

The vast assemblage was for a moment motionless with terror and surprise, expecting universal destruction, for nothing less than the downfall of the whole basilica, with all its ponderous masses of marble on their heads, was expected. A cry arose that the pope was killed, which was echoed in a million different tones according as men's fears or hopes predominated; and the commotion which arose gave a lively idea of what might have followed the fall of the tower of Babel. But even in the first moment of the panic, when it was doubtful whether the whole centre of the basilica was not crumbling down, Lucrezia, with a shriek which rang to its summit, had rushed from the comparative safety of her own position—and when Alfonso opened his eyes, or rather saw again, after the momentary blindness of the shock, he beheld her folded in her father's arms. And if indeed Alexander was the monster which his enemies represented him, never was the might of opinion more remarkably displayed than at that moment, since it could even impose upon himself in a conjuncture of such terror and deadly suspense;

for, as if he were indeed the acceptable vicar of Christ, and high priest of the Eternal, suffering Lucrezia to sink in her exhaustion at his feet, and raising his clasped hands with the majesty of a prophet interposing between the offended heavens and the earth, he uttered a *De Profundis*, with vehement fervour, amid profound silence, the multitude seeming stilled from its panic, which might have been attended with far more deadly consequences than the accident, as if by a spell. There was then a solemn pause—no stone stirred—and a sea-like response of Amen, and an universal sigh of relief which sounded like a forest rising when the wind has passed over it, marked the restoration of confidence.

With a smile of unutterable tenderness, and gently chiding her terrors, Alexander then raised his weeping and half-distracted daughter, who covered both his hands with her kisses and tears. Alfonso thought he beheld a few stern drops from the pontiff's eyes mingle with this feminine overflow; and while the duke, with a crowd of the devotees, rushed round Alexander with congratulations and inquiries, the voice of the Hospitaller was heard above all,—“The summits of St. Peter yet stand!—but if they be not speedily repaired and rebuilt, the whole mass will fall into ruin; even so, pilgrims of the world, will it befall with Christianity!”

“Whoever speaks, says well!—and it were a noble work of piety in the faithful to contribute each his might or his mite towards so great a work!” said Cæsar, whose ambition took the form of the most

rapturous filial joy at his sire's preservation. "But meanwhile, holy father, comfort the hearts of the myriads outside with your presence, lest evil men misdirect their grief and despair!"

"We will to Santa Maria in solemn procession.—Monsignor Ferrara bring with us three hundred gold crowns in the rare chalice presented us by the Hanseatic, in offering to my guardian saint, our Lady of that church!" said Alexander somewhat faintly, adding, "We have great warnings granted us!" and the pontiff drew an ivory reliquary from his bosom, in which it was said that he always carried the Host, which he kissed with great devotion. "Courage, our Lucrezia!—Orsino, lend your support—the elm and the vine, in school comparison! Let us away to Santa Maria Maggiore!"

The immediate attendants of the pontiff had now assembled and brought his chair of state; but he refused to mount it, and desiring all present to follow him to the church he had himself named, to return thanks to the Holy Virgin for his preservation, he headed the procession with Lucrezia, the duke, and a confused multitude of cardinals and courtiers. Burciardo gave one look of utter despair over the masses as they crowded out of the basilica, and apparently abandoned all hope of restoring its order.

Soon were audible the deafening shouts of gratulation which resounded over the Piazza, as the pontifical procession poured out; but Alfonso made no attempt to follow. In an incredibly short time the whole basilica seemed emptied—while he gazed with

a degree of vacancy after the vanishing masses, more gorgeous in their broken and mingled pomp than when in marshalled order, as they passed out of the great portal of the church, lit by the powerful sun. Alfonso stood lost in a confused reverie, for there was not one of his doubts but was deepened by the scene he had witnessed. The wild devotion of Lucrezia to her father—that father's unmoved majesty in so awful a conjuncture—the monk's audacity in proclaiming the abuses of the papacy, his dastardly imputation of the attempt on the Orsini, if the drift of his suspicions had not been misunderstood by Alfonso,—his seeming absence of any feeling of jealousy in the splendid eulogiums he had heaped on a cavalier already so much favoured by Lucrezia! But it occurred to Alfonso that these praises might have been uttered to expose him to the vengeance of the Duke of Romagna; and while musing on this subject, he suddenly discerned the friar, attended by Biccocco, who stood gazing as it were incredulously at the shattered altar pavement and the mass of iron deeply embedded in it. He advanced hastily towards him, but as he approached he was struck by observing the Dominican raise his eyes, sparkling with mad fury, to the sunshine, and clench his hands as if in defiance of its glory. Yet when he reached the spot, he seemed calm, and awaited his approach with perfect composure.

“You hold your life indeed rather as a wrong than as a benefit, monk, since it is thus that you repay its defence!” exclaimed Alfonso, somewhat

staggered by the unmoved countenance of the Dominican.

"If I have done thee any temporal injury, be comforted, for thou hast wrought me an eternal one!" replied Bruno, with a profound sigh.

"I, Dominican!" exclaimed Alfonso, almost concluding at the moment that the Penitentiary was out of his senses.

"Even thou!—the struggle of the dark and bright angel were over in my soul, when thou didst come to renew it!" said Fra Bruno, in a tone of exceeding bitterness. "And yet again I had strung my soul to its mighty task—I beheld you again—and I shrunk from it, a second and more cowardly Judas!"

"Shrunk, brother! when you lashed them till their souls must have more weals in them than the windy sea!" said Biccocco, wonderingly.

"My commission was to call upon the whole Christian world, herein assembled, to form themselves into a general council, and eject from a chair which he had obtained by simony, with the aid of the devil, Roderic Borgia, commonly called Pope Alexander VI.," said the monk, furiously. "Which simony has rendered all his acts and deeds null, and rolls back upon himself and the fiend who supports him all the scandal and infamy which the deeds of the pretended vicar of Christ throw upon Christianity itself!"

“Take your superior out of the temple; he is mad and blasphemous!” said the Hospitaller, appalled at this wild outburst.

“Else that the church should anon be rent in twain, and form a chasm down which countless generations shall fall into the abyss!” continued the monk, rapidly, and then gnashing his teeth as if the remembrance of his failure rushed upon him.

“If he would but have taken a morsel of the grilled fowl, or a bite of wheaten bread!—but he has been a-hungering these four-and-thirty hours!” said Biccocco, also staring aghast.

“I am not hungry—I feel no corporeal pang—scorch me with fire, and I shall not feel it—and thus perchance my despair shall be too great even for the tortures of hell to give me the relief of anguish!” continued the monk. “But, Knight, thou owest me no vengeance—I have saved thee—I have made this city a place of terror for thee! Cæsar suspects thee—remain and thou art lost!—Or if it be true that I have wronged thee,—come when thou wilt—during all the season of the Jubilee—thou wilt find me a ruin amongst ruins, on Aven-tine!”

“Tell me only, monk, how could my presence throw obstacles in the way of thine intents?” said Alfonso, perceiving that Fra Bruno had turned to depart, and more doubtful than ever that his sanity was disturbed by maceration and religious melancholy.

“Biccocco has told you—I am very faint—lost—I

know not what I say!" returned the Dominican, clutching his companion's shoulder as if about to fall. "Lead me to the open sunshine!—sunshine—darkness! darkness, nothing but darkness—and for ever!"

CHAPTER V.

“ Non con spiriti costretti tali incanti,
Nè con osservazion di stelle fanno,
Ma con simulazion, menzogne, e frodi,
Legano i cor d’ indissolubil nodi.”

ARIOSTO.

Not with constrained fiends such charms are wrought,
Nor observation of the midnight stars,
But with deceit, and fraud, and lies, they make
Chains which the shackled spirit cannot break.

It was sunrise on the morning following the ominous opening of the jubilee of the fifteenth century. The young rays piercing at a grilled window in the castle of Santangelo, lighted two persons engaged in conversation, and showed that the walls were hung with various instruments of torture, and even the ceiling was set with hooks and rings as if for the same purposes. One of the interlocutors was John of the Catacombs, looking bruised and ghastly in the morning light; the other was Don Migueloto, whose usually murky visage was now lit up with vexation like a blacksmith’s rusty forge.

“ Yea, we have missed our chance—but this cursed Ferrarese shall have a handful from our ill-luck—let but his highness hear your story,” said Don Mi-

gueloto, who had been listening to the bravo's long detail. "And hark! I hear him, for all he comes on such soft wolf's paws!"

Almost as these words were uttered, Cæsar entered the chamber, wrapped in a long Spanish cloak, and with a plain hat slouched over his visage, so that he appeared to be scarcely above the rank of a common citizen. He was engaged in so profound a rumination, that at first he did not notice the sinister form of the bravo, and when his eye lighted on him, he gave a start backward and drew some weapon from his breast.

"My lord!—it is honest John whom you desired to see!" exclaimed Migueloto. The bravo bent almost to his boots, or rather sandals, for they closely resembled the ancient Italian greaves.

"Cry you mercy, honest John!" said the duke, returning the bend with mock solemnity. "Who could have expected to meet with anything honest so early, and in such company! But you spoke in good time, Miguel, for my finger was on the spring of this toy, and if there had been a dozen of you, every man would have had his share of poisoned needles somewhere in the face—best in the eyes."

And whether in warning, or to exhibit the ingenious toy to which he alluded to such excellent connoisseurs, he opened his hand, and displayed a round ball pierced all over with needle-holes. "But honest John," he continued smilingly, "thou look'st for all the world as if thou hadst been crushed in a wine-press,—I swear thou art of as many tints as a vineyard in October! Tell us how it all befell—and be

honest now indeed, or—" and his eye glanced significantly over the instruments of torture. But John of the Catacombs needed no impelling force to detail his wrongs, of which he evidently cherished the most bitter recollection.

"Well!—thou hast failed, man; the best of us may fail, even with the devil's own hand in it," said Cæsar, thoughtfully, and not at all so excited against the meddling Hospitaller as the two friends anticipated.

"But, Signor, he has safely lodged your spy in the Orsini palace," said Migueloto, intercedingly.

"Ay, but instead of a scratch, I hear your fellow struck at his neck as if it were to butch a calf," returned the duke. "Yet the Orsini will put the stronger faith in him—a skin-wound might have been suspected. And now, honest John, art thou not very anxious and resolved to be avenged, instead of grateful, for all these pretty colours in which the knight has tricked you out?"

"Signor,—Fra Bruno is a most holy saint of God! I will not lift mine arm against him," said the bravo, with zealous earnestness.

"Sayest thou so, Roman mobster?" returned Cæsar, hastily. "Nay, then, he is dangerous!—But after the doctrine he delivered yesterday on Lucrezia's nuptials, I cannot spare him as yet to heaven!—The cat's wauling vexes the ear, but it keeps the rats from our bacon, perchance. Fear not for him!—I spoke of this archangel of thine, who hath the sledge-hammer to his wrist."

"Would your highness have light let him to

brighten his vision in our matters?" said the bravo eagerly, and knitting his surly brows. "But whether 'tis a job or not, I owe him a turn of mine own free good-will, which I will pay him ere many suns go down in Rome!"

"It was therefore I summoned thee; for, hearken, honest John, I will not have one hair of his head plucked out but by him who means to die by some strange and marrow-piercing torture," returned Cæsar suddenly; and his two attendants stared at one another in vacant astonishment. "Remember what I have said—keep thy tongue in thy teeth; double whatever has been promised him, captain, and let him go!"

Migueloto bowed submissively but still more surprisedly, and gave a signal to honest John, who followed him, staring and bending confusedly to the duke. When they had disappeared, Cæsar, with a slight smile at their puzzled visages, left the Chamber of Questions, as it was called, and ascended by a narrow, unlighted staircase to a door which admitted him on the ramparts of the tower of Santangelo.

Day had not long dawned, and the sky was flecked all over with little rosy clouds, the sun being still behind the remote hills of the Campagna. The tranquillity of night and the beauty of day were united in that lovely morning twilight. The bright and animating breeze which played over the extensive scene below, appeared to be the only thing awake throughout its piles of palaces—its woods, vineyards, ruins,—the desolate plains which stretched beyond the walls—the fortress and its neighbouring river.

Seated on a huge culverin in one of the embrasures, leaning on her arm as if lost in contemplation of the scene below, with Cæsar's bloodhounds asleep at her feet, was Donna Fiamma. The duke approached on tiptoe, yet not so lightly but that the hounds raised their heads; and recognizing him, couched contentedly down. Not so Fiamma, who remained immersed in thought until Cæsar, gallantly kneeling, pressed his lip to her hand.

Fiamma turned, and the profound sadness in her countenance sparkled up into brightness as she perceived her lover in his attitude of tenderness and humility.

"Thou seest, love," said Cæsar as he embraced her with apparently rapturous delight, "thou see'st—perverse and froward as thou art! how early I can leave the bride thou enviest so, to come to thee." But hast thou thought of my plans, and art thou willing to execute thine own part in them?"

"Why, I am sold to thee!—I am what thou wilt have me, Cæsar!—I have no excuse now; no refuge in any part of my soul! I am not betrayed—I have fallen—knowingly—fallen below mine own contempt or pity!" returned Fiamma. "But speak on thy words of love: there is a music in them which sounds to me with a kind of gentler anguish, as if one of the damned should hear music dimly floating out of paradise!"

"Then say that thou lovest me, love!—it was a word which was ever cooing on thy lips once," returned Cæsar, tenderly. "But now—nay, nay, thou dost not love me now!"

“ Oh, if I did not love thee, my Cæsar !—woman and lost as I am—we had not met again !” said the hapless lady, sinking into those ready arms.

“ Then how couldst thou hesitate to lend me thine aid, seeing on what a balanced ball I waver ?” returned Cæsar, in a tone of mingled reproach and tenderness. “ Or art thou too—Colonna as thou wert before we loved !—a partisan of the Orsini alliance and of my ruin ?”

“ The Orsini !—ruthless butchers !—no,” replied Fiamma, vehemently. “ But it is strange that thou shouldst wish me to counterfeit thy sister—to play the wanton in thy sister’s name !”

“ A carnival joke ! But it is her nature thou wilt play, and no assumption,” returned the Duke. “ Thou dost not wrong her—what manner of damsel she is, all Italy—even you prisoners have heard !”

“ Yet if we believed all that we have heard, Cæsar !—if even we could deem it possible !” said Fiamma, with a burning wildness in her gaze which startled even the Borgia.

“ I speak not now of the lies that are told of *us*, but of the truths that are told of her,” he replied, hastily ; and rising, he walked up and down as he continued,—“ But since the part mislikes thee, only to some few whom I suspect need you play it—to the captains of the Black Bands thou shalt be another—they are men for the most part of galliard disposition—thou art beautiful, matchlessly beautiful ! and for the nonce shalt be the wife of our castellan here—but let not Migueloto know the jest till it is well played, for he forsooth is an hidalgo and an old

Christian! Under this guise, we will invite the captains to some private collation in Santangelo—while the good castellain is abroad, and—why dost thou stare so dismally, as if I bade thee truly—betray myself?”

“Forgive me! I knew not quite how low I had fallen,” said Fiamma, biting her nether lip till the blood flowed, and glaring fixedly upward. “Forgive me—I am not accustomed to be the thing I am—I will abandon myself to it anon—but memory and consciousness!—can only death destroy them?—Can Death?—Why, if so, lies he not couched at the base of these battlements?”

“What marvel that I look in vain around me for some hope, since they who love me best will not pronounce a few words—a few carnival sweetnesses—to save me,” exclaimed Cæsar, mournfully. “Canst thou dream, sweet wife, that I would suffer the impious breath of another to profane thy beauty? I alone will meet them in the castle! Amazed at beholding one another there, if even they listen not to my gilded promises, an universal doubt shall arise among them, which will almost serve my purposes as well! Idiot that I was! I had even prepared a masking array such as my jealousy approved! The garb of Queen Morgan le Fay, glittering all over with gems, as if of woven gold-dust—in which I thought to witness the adoration thy loveliness must provoke, humbly following thee in the guise of a black slave,” said Cæsar, assuming an injured and sorrowful air.

“Thou!—why then, indeed, if thou lovest me, I will plague thee fairly even with thine own device,” said Fiamma, suddenly. “And if thou hast any regard for the honour of thy name, methinks I will overplay thy sister’s part, be she all that thou art wont to call her.”

“Thou canst not against one whom I would have thee assay with all the allurements thou knowest but too well how to spread, like a bank of flowers that flatters every sense,” said Cæsar. “Did not Migueloto tell thee of a marvellous Knight of St. John—a religious who keeps his vows—a man of marble who stalks about among us searching into mischiefs against me, as an he were some commissioner sent from above to turn up the edges of our darknesses, and utterly ruin us.”

“Chiefly, methinks I heard that he refused to be Lucrezia’s knight, and with a strange scornfulness,” replied Fiamma.

“So beauteous a dame as some call her—and offering herself with a marvellous unguardedness and warmth!” continued Cæsar. “But hast thou never heard in ballads, my Fiamma, that slighted love makes a colder nun than all the vows of the eleven thousand virgins of Cologne?”

“I may live to know it,” returned Fiamma.

“Never, never, unless your love wanders from mine,” said Cæsar, ardently. “But to continue—Lucrezia was created only for pleasure, as the passion-flower only for light; it is her element, and one

frost would fold up her luxuriance for ever. And therein I see a little speck of light which, when it breaks, will flood the sky. Thou knowest, Sabbat prophecies my ruin in Lucrezia's marriage—but the Orsini must not doubt my love for them and their princely house—and Paolo should have my most zealous assistance, did I but know there is a woman's fancy in the way to render all, even her sire's commands, of no avail."

"But if—if Lucrezia be still so fair as once she was—certes, she will not love in vain," said Fiamma.

Oh, but thou hast not seen my marvellous Hospitalier—my man of ice," replied Cæsar, gaily. "Yet I would be well assured, ere I use him to my purposes. And thou, who art so skilled in imitating the tones and gestures of others,—disguised and masked—and we are marvellously favoured in Lucrezia's caprice who has refused the Orsini accompaniment, and declares she will view the carnival in some unknown disguise—mayst easily assay his metal, which perchance is false, albeit it rings so silvery clear. Moreover, we can try what rivalry may prompt, for he hath a brother-in-arms, a galliard English noble, who stares at Lucrezia as if he had never seen a woman before, and could not but wonder what manner of gaudy bird it might be! But now I must hasten to send thy mummeries and assume mine own; for I noted not, in our love-talk, how broadly the sun had risen. Come!—since thou art such a looker back—remember that

thou wert never wont to let me leave thee without one little kiss, freely bestowed, not taken."

The recollection, thus skilfully touched, went to the depths of the fair Roman's soul, and Cæsar left not the battlements without some such pledge of tenderness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CARNIVAL OF THE JUBILEE.

“They say this town is full of cozenage ;
As nimble jesters that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such like liberties of sin.”

Comedy of Errors.

THE Orsini and their noble guests were busily engaged in preparing a gorgeous masque, to form the cortége of Lucrezia in the carnival. A young painter in the train of the Duke of Urbino, named Raffaello Sanzio, was the chief contriver of the pageantry, and lavished on it the beauty and splendour of his dawning genius, and it was expected to produce an effect favourable to Paolo with Donna Lucrezia, the magnificence and elegance of whose tastes were likely to be gratified in it. Great, therefore, was the disappointment when Burciardo arrived in the palace, with a message from Donna Lucrezia, declining the intended accompaniment ; but the refusal was softened by a declaration which was added, that she expected

love would take off his fillet for once, and recognize her in whatever disguise she assumed, and meanwhile she desired that the pageant of his triumph, projected by the Orsino, should be exhibited as originally intended. Le Beaufort knew not how to account for the feeling of satisfaction which rose in his bosom at the disappointment of his friend; but as the Orsini and their guests were to accompany the Triumph in various characters of the Knights of the Round Table, he enacted his part of the cheerful and chivalrous Sir Launcelot of the Lake with a vivacity which deepened the characteristics of the amorous and melancholy Sir Tristan, assumed by Lord Paolo.

The Duke of Gravina was the representative of the royal Arthur, and he of Urbino, with his frame deformed and blasted with the gout, personated the enchanter, Merlin. Vitellozzo disdained not to enhance the effect of the spectacle by appearing as a pagan giant, especially as it allowed him to wear armour, out of which, in Rome, he did not feel at ease. The other personages of the round table, familiar to the imagination of all the European populations, were judiciously distributed; and as each knight was characteristically arrayed, attended by his squires, his banner, and minstrels, the spectacle was very splendid. It was only when the knights assumed their masks, in which the passions for which in the chivalric romances they were chiefly renowned, were caricatured by skilful artists, that they became grotesque as suited a carnival show.

The masking commenced at noonday, and the Knight of St. John, wandering almost at random

through the city, mingled absently amidst the riot and splendour and universal gaiety of the great Christian saturnalia. At a period of such general dissolution of manners, when in addition to the licentious populations of Italy, the city was crowded with foreigners, the violence of whose passions had brought them thither, and whose customs were infinitely more gross and brutish—the confusion and effervescence passed all ordinary displays, or modern conception. The jubilants, rid of the weight of their sins, and surrounded by all the temptations which the luxurious and dissolute city could offer, abandoning itself to all its fervent passions, too often ran up a new score.

The endless variety of costume which a multitude, assembled from every corner of Europe, must present, was now exaggerated by the wild fancifulness and grotesque gaiety of carnival devices. And though this revelry was common to all the nations of the Christian world, it was practised in such different forms as influenced by climate and national character, that the contrast, when thus thrown into comparison, was a perpetual source of amusement and surprise. The sober northmen beheld with amazement the excesses into which the ardent temperament of the south, released from every shackle, rushed like a gentle river, suddenly falling over rocks in a cataract—all sparkle, uproar, and shining tumult. And the southrons revelling in their own wild gaiety and extravagance, failed not to satirise their visitors with the most laughable buffooneries, ingeniously

veiled from the notice of the strangers themselves, whose violence and ignorant pride were justly dreaded by the Italians.

Passing through streets which blazed with banners and pictured tapestries, and flowers and rich ornaments displayed on the balconies and window-sills, which rang with shouts and laughter and ribaldry and roaring music,—the Hospitaller hastened on—he knew not whither. The revellers, imagining that he was disguised in his religious habit to mock it, beset him in various shapes to elicit the jests and sarcasms with which they supposed him to be fraught. A legion of devils surrounded him with hideous visages and flaming torches, imploring his benediction, and leave to return to hell to get out of the noise and clatter of a Christian festival; anon, a giantess caught him in her arms, and with fierce blandishments, made still more fearful by a monstrous mask and beard, assailed him with lascivious love-making. Tearing himself from her powerful embraces, which were in reality those of a huge German soldier, with a difficulty which roused a tumult of laughter, Alfonso became involved in a multitude who were pelting with sweetmeats a long tatterdemalion, bedizened car, in which came nine women, playing on various instruments of music, all of goodly persons, scarcely at all concealed by the tinselled rags they wore—a circumstance which in that age excited not the slightest animadversion, but to the contrary, great and general satisfaction. The inscription which they bore on a canopy over their

heads, though probably a jest which disclosed their real purposes, revealed the agency of intellects of a higher order than those who executed most of the satirical buffooneries which abounded, many of which were indeed 'inventions of Machiavelli, who was famous for this species of practical wit.

"The Muses nine are we—and courtesans of Naples—
Of whose lush clime, in all time, we were counted staples ;
To our lord, the Pope, we owe the pomp in which we go,
Our condition, to our lovers—the Princes of the Po."

Smiling tartly at the allusion to the meagre patronage which the turmoiled pontiff bestowed on the learned, and the meretricious flatteries to which they were reduced by that of the northern courts of Italy, including his father's, Alfonso passed on, encountering innumerable demons, fairies, satyrs, and fauns. Deities of all the ancient and modern mythologies, known, or wildly guessed at from the reports of travellers, met, and engaged in mock disputes and ribaldry, in which every form of religion was turned into ridicule by men at other seasons wrapt in superstitious terrors. The carnivallers seemed to expect that Heaven, like the Roman masters of old, when their slaves enjoyed the license of the saturnalia, would take no notice of what was said or done during this outburst of liberty in its own.

Over all the changeful splendours and ever-varying movement, shone the festal sun of Italy, in whose brightness even a funeral puts on an air of good cheer and enjoyment. The wildest combinations of dreams never presented anything stranger than these of the

carnival of the Jubilee ; but the glorious effulgence seemed to harmonize all things, and a magic world was created by its glow in which the strangest vagaries of the phantasmagoria were no longer wonderful. Mermaids with their tails calmly folded around them ; cormorants who preached burlesque sermons on the top of lofty stilts, exhorting the people to listen to what they said, which was of such efficacy that they need take no care of their purses ; broken columns which walked, and reminded the spectators of the misfortunes of the exiled Colonnas ; bears that jeered at them ; friars who paraded along with asses' heads and goats' feet ; leopards who chaunted *Misereres* on their hind legs ; wolves, with shears in their paws, inquiring for the Christian flock ; tigers and monkeys who danced merrily together ; enormous owls which sang in melodious concert, refuting augury ; nought seemed wild or improbable. Sometimes a group of bacchanals reeled past, imitating in their songs, vine-twisted brows, half-naked forms, and lascivious gestures, the traditions of antiquity, who encountering a grave bevy of nuns, compelled them to drain their goblets, and join in a frantic dance.

National characteristics were rather heightened in colouring than effaced by the chaotic mingling. Spanish stateliness, German grossness and grotesque wildness of fancy, French coxcombrity, English humour, appeared in the most resolute efforts to imitate opposite characteristics. In vain was the Spaniard an ape, or the Frenchman a lion ; the one stalked, and the other tripped. But when, as frequently hap-

pened, pilgrims of the same nation had united to compose spectacles in the style of their respective countries, a magnificent and bizarre effect was produced. Each nation took the opportunity to vaunt its glories before the gaze of the rest ; but the most appropriate to the occasion were those of the Spaniards, leading Moors in chains, and parading some feather-garbed natives of the newly discovered West Indies.

Above all, the Roman lords vied with each other in the gorgeousness and picturesque arrangement of their pageants, and the artistic taste and splendour of these exhibitions astonished the unrefined strangers of the north. Among these Alfonso's attention was much attracted by the Orsini masque, which he encountered in his peregrinations. The beautifully painted banners, borne by the knights of King Arthur, which represented the most touching events produced by the agency of love, in history or romance, flaming in the sun ; the resplendent armour and colours of the warriors and their steeds, and the triumph itself, which in elegance and perfection of design resembled a Grecian bas-relief put into motion and vitality, excited universal admiration. On a car of silver, surmounted with a canopy of roses, drawn by six snowy steeds with trappings of flowers, came the god Eros, worthily represented by the blooming young Raffaello, the designer of the spectacle, with wings, arrows, and bow, his lightly-clad form scarcely less beautiful, or more masculine, than the Cupid whom Psyche loved. The Hours, clad in the bright-

est tints, and linked by chains of roses, danced around his car whenever it halted ; immediately after which, in chains, came Anteros, the god of slighted love, and who avenges its pangs, surrounded by his myrmidons similarly shackled, and most expressively masked—Jealousy, Discord, Drunkenness, Scorn, Hate, and other domestic plagues. Anteros was enacted by Fabio Orsino, at his own desire, against the artist's respectful wish that he would take the office of the superior and more joyful divinity. And there was much in his young, sorrowful, and brooding visage, pale as if with the fires of a passion which consumed itself inwardly, to realize the god of “despised love.” The Desires, Constancy, Sighs, Chastity, and all the domestic virtues, wielding various appropriate arms, kept guard over these prisoners ; and Hymen brought up the rear, holding his unlighted torch to the sun, as if to kindle it at his pure and eternal ray.

Satirical buffooneries abounded : almost immediately after this procession had passed, amidst the acclamations of the people, came a figure of Truth, streaming with water and weeds, as if just risen from her well, who shook her head in reply to the numerous questions addressed to her, pointing to the padlock on her mouth. Then came a Curtius on a lean horse, with a multitude of puppets dressed as French, Spaniards, and Germans, with whom he was going to leap into a gulf for the salvation of his country ; a pantaloon hobbled after him, robed as a Venetian doge, and complaining that his French shoes were too tight to walk in. The alliance between Naples

and the Spaniards was figured by a fox and a goose waddling along together, bearing the motto "*Amigos à la muerte*"—Friends to death.

It was remarkable that although there were many severe allegorical sarcasms directed at the pope and his daughter, the boldest of the jesters had not ventured to aim at Cæsar—the halving of Don Remiro was too recent an event. In those directed against Lucrezia, however, there was often as much tenderness as blame. It seemed as if the voluptuous southrons could not find it in their hearts to condemn her with severity; and yet Alfonso scanned each new group with the feelings of one who expects every instant to suffer the renewed pangs of some lulled ache. On one occasion he met with a procession escorting a car, on which was a statue very well moulded in wax to represent Lucrezia, but with the attributes of a Venus, borne in triumph by a crowd of masks, in the habit of cardinals, ringing bells, and profanely calling on all good Christians to love one another, after the good example set them by the heads of the church. Yet almost immediately after he was somewhat comforted by observing a figure advancing along by singular leaps, half toad and half serpent, painted all over tongues, and labelled "*Calumny*," under cover of which candid acknowledgment he repeated malignant distichs, with surprising versatility and invention, which mystically included the blackest charges against Alexander, his children, and his court, and in whom Alfonso was not long before he recognized Paschino.

Musing on the coincidence, the prince became in-

volved, he scarcely knew how, in the tumultuous throngs which swayed up and down the Corso. Wandering amidst the glittering confusion, and at times scarcely heeding it, his attention was suddenly caught, with that of many others, by the approach of a singular and very magnificent show.

Entering the Corso came a troop of persons in the richest and most glaring Oriental costumes, leaping, dancing, and making the air resound with noisy instruments of music—tambours, bells, cymbals, and gongs,—which kept up an incessant jingle and roar of melody. These heralded a lady, garbed to represent the royal, licentious, and deceptive fairy, Morgana, who was thus suitably attended because that in Italy all fairies were held to be unbelievers, and all unbelievers either Turks or Saracens. She sat in a castle, on the back of an elephant caparisoned with scarlet and gold; and as it was built of little squares and lozenges of burnished looking-glass set in a silver framework, its sparkle and evanescence answered the ideas entertained of the illusive pomps of the watery fay. The figure of the enchantress was beautifully moulded, and amply displayed in her rich garb of gold lace besprent with diamonds as thick as dew. Her hair was concealed by an immense turban, and her face by the most hideous mask imaginable, one half being that of a gorgon, the other of a beautiful woman.

“Viva Morgana!” resounded on every side, and by the throngs which pressed around her, the laughter, and continual clapping of hands, it appeared that the fairy’s wit equalled her splendour; moreover, she

distributed innumerable little nosegays with which her castle seemed stocked, and pelted the crowd when they pressed on her too eagerly with a storm of gilded sweetmeats. At times she spoke in a pretended eastern language, but which was in reality an ingenious and laughable compound of the dialects of Italy, to a black slave who guided her elephant with a wand of mother-of-pearl, who was arrayed with great splendour to represent the accursed Maomèt himself, and whose face was concealed in a mask which frightfully exaggerated the characteristics of a negro visage, of gigantic size. Wielding a broad and gleaming sabre, the slave affected the airs of a jealous oriental, by flourishing it among those admirers who pushed too near ; but ever and anon he turned back, and whispered to some of the maskers whom he selected.

From these signs Alfonso conjectured no good of the fairy, but his interest was strongly excited by remembering that the only elephant in Italy, and on which consequently she was enthroned, belonged to the pope—part of the spoils of Sultan Zem. In his anxiety to ascertain who the lady might be, he pushed eagerly forward among the crowd, and as he approached, the negro's eye gleamed upon him from the depths of his mask ; he uttered a screech of joy, and muttered some words to the fairy in a tone which the uproarious throng could not overhear. Morgana immediately gave a signal to her whole retinue to halt, and beckoned to the Hospitaller so pointedly that he could not doubt he was the personage distinguished by her summons. He approached in a fever

of curiosity and fear lest he should find his anticipations verified.

“What would you with me, illustrious fairy?” said Alfonso, in a voice whose tranquil sternness contrasted with the enthusiastic clamour around.

“Nay, what would you with me, Sir Knight of the cross and buffalo?” replied the fairy in tones whose low, liquid, perfidious sweetness resembled those of a syren imitating some fine earthly harmony to lure the mariner amid the crimson flowers blooming among her rocks over festering carcases. “I am the Fata Morgana—who am all things to all men—even what their own wishes would have! To the soldier, glory; to the priest, dominion; to the poet, immortality; to the lover, his mistress; to every madness, in brief, its proper frenzy; name thou thine.”

“Nay, fairy—since thou art as fallacious as the waves in which thou raisest thy translucent palaces—so sea-green bright without, so dark within,—to sink with all who trust themselves in thy treacherous bowers!” replied the Hospitaller. “Yet if thou canst aid me in my research, I will confess that—I seek for one whom I would not find.”

“Then art thou truly my lord and sultan—I come from the land of Upside Down, whereof I am queen,” said the enchantress. “There the men are bashful, and the women wooers; and as thou seest, hearing the custom prevailed latterly in Rome, I am come here to choose me a seraglio from among all the modest beauties of thy sex—and justly methinks thou art entitled to the most honourable place; therefore

mount and accompany me on my elephant, which already kneels of its own grace and understanding."

The prodigious creature did indeed, at a signal from the negro's wand, bend its massive knees on the pavement, and with a huge yawn seemed to await the result of the conference.

"Sorceress queen! the order of all nature is too much reversed in your kingdom for me to venture in it, while I still walk erect—even Circe made men hogs before she put them in sties!" returned the severe knight. "Moreover, the disappearances from your seraglio are so numerous and so tragical, that it is conjectured by some there is a hidden snake in it."

"But I have never loved till now—or I would have made me some charm to stiffen the green reptile, jealousy!" returned the fairy. "Hear but how melodiously I have lamented the circumstance, long before I could have dreamed to bring it in evidence."

And she sang, or rather chanted, in the same sweet, penetrating, and yet direful voice the following lines, which Alfonso remembered that Bembo had recited to him as the composition of Donna Lucrezia.

DITHYRAMBIC.

For that I love not, Lovers!
 Your gentle blame around me hovers,
 That bites like quarrelling doves beneath the noontide covers!
 But rather should ye pity show,
 As to one fluttering in the windy snow,
 That sees, but cannot reach, some sunny glow!—
 Fain would I love, and all my soul
 Yield to the burning god's control!
 Fain in the universal harmony
 No more a discord be!—

For, better than your choral lyres can prove,
 I feel that all things are attuned to Love !
 There's not a star in Heaven that burns
 Nor flower that upwards lifts its coloured urns,
 Nor murmur of the odorous breeze
 Kissing our soft Italian seas,
 But preaches his religion of delight !
 Music is but his murmuring in dreams,
 Laughter, his footstep flashing over streams,
 His breath, the scent of dewy flowers by night !
 The boundless noonday hush
 His silence is—and twilight's golden blush
 His wakening from the sleep
 Of rosy childhood, to be lulled again
 By brown-robed Night, his nurse, with many an old-world strain,
 So sweet the listeners weep !
 Yea ! but Love playing with his grandsire's shafts,
 Are lightnings—else so dread—sabres of unseen hafts !
 Fain,
 The ecstatic wine of life to drain,
 And know existence's extremes of joy and pain,
 Lovers, I would love and be beloved !—but 'tis in vain !
 Oh, vainly all things, Love, with thee conspire,
 My souls reflects but warms not in thy fire !
 Yet say not that the faculty divine,
 The infinite desire—are not mine,—
 As all light centred, is the sun,—
 Could all I am be one,
 Thought, feeling, memory, hope, fear, light, breath,
 Love it must be or—DEATH !

“ If thou hast never loved—why, then, thou hast
 not even a base apology to be the thing thou art !
 thou shouldst have been the madness of love, which
 else thou art of brutish appetite ! ” returned the Hos-
 pitaller, with extreme violence. “ Go on thy way, as

I will on mine; and may they never cross each other again!"

The populace applauded, considering that the religious knight was sustaining his character.

"I must seek those then who are not so wise as to be miserable—to refuse the quaff of pleasure because other lips have been to the goblet," returned the enchantress gaily. "But at least thou wilt not refuse to do me this little favour—to bid thy friend, the handsome English knight, come hither, and take the place which thou refusest."

"This I will do—to prove that I envy it not," replied the Hospitaller, now thoroughly irritated, and retreating hurriedly among the crowd, who laughed heartily at the conclusion of the dialogue. The fairy made a haughty gesture, the procession moved on, and Alfonso imagined he had torn himself out of its dangerous influence, when suddenly he felt his mantle plucked, and turning he beheld the negro.

"Signor, that you may do your errand better with the English knight, if it be impossible that your own obduracy should relent, Queen Morgan le Fay desires you to accept her portrait in this case," said the negro, producing an armlet in which was a large gold medallion, which he handed to the knight, attentively watching him as he examined it. The medallion was beautifully chased, and represented a figure of the ancient Lucretia stabbing herself.

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Alfonso.

"Every medal has its reverse," replied the black,

showing his white teeth at the huge lips of his mask, and pressing a spring which flew open and revealed a fine miniature of the celestial countenance of Lucrezia Borgia.

“ I will deliver this portrait to Sir Reginald, with your lady’s message,” said the knight, with affected tranquillity. “ Return and tell her so.”

“ If thou dost this——” returned the negro, speaking in a tone which had nigh betrayed him, but almost instantly changing it. “ If thou dost this—thou shalt be canonized alive !”

Laughing bitterly, Alfonso stole away and hastened in the direction in which a short time previously he had noticed the Triumph of Love taking its way amidst the acclamations of the people. But considerably to his surprise and vexation, he had not gone far before he perceived Le Beaufort riding up the street alone, his mask laid aside, and scanning all the groups he encountered with great curiosity.

Summoning all his resolution, Alfonso accosted the young knight, and inquired how it chanced that he was thus alone ; to which Le Beaufort dejectedly replied, that, being unable to discover Lucrezia, and afraid that all the fine verses they had prepared would be wasted, it was agreed that they should separate in every direction on a quest after her. “ Then art thou as was ever thy wont, Sir Launcelot, the fortunate knight of the adventure !” replied Alfonso ; and he related his encounter, delivered his message, and the armlet, without the least outward sign of his inward feel-

ings, but observing the flush which coloured Sir Reginald's bronzed fairness, he added, "Make haste, make haste!—for thou art one of many!"

"Were it over a precipice, and so fair a damsel summoned me, I would on!" returned Le Beaufort, with enthusiastic delight. "And in very truth, if thou art canonized, as the infidel said, I will light a candle to thee all the year round; for wert even thou in my way—yea, by'r Lady, though thou art my dearest friend—if all good and all evil angels stood between!—I know not what I say—but I will learn her pleasure, or perish on the road!"

"Wilt thou not warn thy friend, the Orsino, of the discovery, that he may bear thee company to his lady's presence?" said the Hospitaller.

"Nay, Don Alfonso, for no true knight would linger to obey a lady's behest!" replied Le Beaufort, hurriedly, and urging his horse forward. "She may not choose that it should be known—may charge me with some mockery to him;—tut, brother-in-arms, never fear that I shall drown in a cup of water!" And he darted past, putting his courser to a pace which threatened danger to all whom it encountered.

It would scarcely be possible to analyse the confusion of emotions with which Alfonso watched the departure of his young comrade, and which kept him fixed on the spot gazing after him long after he had disappeared. Compassion and anger—regret and disdain and jealousy—were all ingredients; and when at length he resumed his way, regardless whither, the tumult without passed almost unheeded.

Cerberuses darted their three heads in his face without making him start; huge frogs leaped in his way, and croaked raillery at him, without provoking him to reply; the Furies shook their torches at him; the syrens wooed him with lascivious songs,—and he disregarded both. Even a hydra hissed its many heads at him in vain; and yet his eye understood with little aid of the mind the bold political allegory contained in the carcass of the direful monster, which represented in hieroglyphics the chief disturbers of Italy. The serpent tail represented the Sforzas, whose arms were that reptile; the body, the winged lion of Venice. The lion of Florence, the wolf of Sienna, the panther of Lucca, the eagle of Ferrara, the bear of the Orsini; and a variety of other heraldic crests of the factions and states of Italy, all surmounted by the triple crown, and with a broken column in one of the hydra's paws, by which it limped along, completed the allegory.

Alfonso afterwards remembered that as he quitted the Corso a graceful figure of a Sicilian dancing girl tripped across his path, and beating a tambour above her head, seemed to invite him to join in her amusement. But he hastened on, and although the form still swam in his fancy as one of exceeding beauty, and ærial voluptuousness of outline, he had almost lost the impression when he suddenly found himself in the open space before the Capitol.

CHAPTER VII.

“Chè se ben con effetto io non peccai,
Io dò materia che ognun dica
Ch’essendo vagabonda io sia impudica.”

ARIOSTO.

For though, in reality, I do nothing wrong,
I give the world occasion to report,
Because I stroll about, that—I’m a bad one, in short!

IN the space before the Capitol there was some degree of tranquillity, for it was chiefly those who were weary of the uproar, or who desired to cool themselves by unmasking, that went thither. Their strange accoutrements still formed splendid groupings and kaleidoscope effects of colour, but without the fatiguing confusion of the Corso. It was drawing towards evening, and the deepening purple of the sky mellowed the glaring tints into a sober richness, like autumn foliage at sunset. The moon gleamed pale as an alabaster lamp in the still sun-fraught heavens, but trembled luminously on the waters of a fountain which flowed from beneath the palace of the Capitol. Innumerable groups of the populace, in their strange tinselled disguises, sat or lolled on the

ground, discussing the amusements of the day, eating fruit, handing calabashes of wine or water to one another, jesting, laughing, love-making, singing little scraps of the breviary chaunts to droll airs, or profane ballads with choruses from the psalms. Sometimes, seated in circles, they improvisated lively epigrams on each other and all around them, or answered remoter groups in jeering songs which occasionally led to words and blows. The Neapolitans, lively as their own polichinelli, contrasted with the Venetians, grave and silent as the waves they lived on; the elegant and vivacious Tuscan, with the sombre and yet fiery Roman; all with their foreign visitors. The oyster-like Batavian might be seen staring in vacant amazement at the supple Greek, as he disported with others in the graceful dances of his country. The German, accustomed to a severe sky, marvelled to behold the Sicilian making preparations to spend the night under the bare stars; and the English islander seemed never weary of listening to the sea-like flow of the Venetian barcarols, while perchance his eye was fixed with astonishment and curiosity on a group of girls who had clubbed nose-gays to weave into an ingenious tapestry of flowers. Grotesque parties of more dignified maskers—vizard in hand—paraded up and down, engaged in conversation, and enjoying the sweet coolness of the evening air.

Fevered with agitation, Alfonso made his way to the fountain, and seated on the margin, despite the chattering groups which continually clustered and dispersed around it, felt his spirit calm in the

monotony of the buzz, and the rushing gurgle of the waters streaming down the rock, and spurting from various grotesque mouths of lions and dolphins. The shadows deepened, the stars began to sparkle moistly over the blackening cypresses which crowned the hills around, and the innumerable palaces and ruins upon them stood forth in distinctness of splendour or desolation against the brightness of the horizon.

The Hospitaller mused on the events of the day with exceeding bitterness. Without a spice of the vanity of the coxcomb in his lofty and austere character, still he could not have failed to observe that Lucrezia's eyes had discoursed to him something warmer than the gratitude due to her deliverer even from so great a peril. And now her licentious coquetry in the character of the royal sorceress confirmed all the tales of her profligacy—made every darker accusation probable—even gave a gloss of likelihood to the insinuations of Cæsar against her confessor;—for whom would such a Messalina deem unworthy of her arts? The mental agonies which so evidently preyed on the monk, might be the viper-stingings of remorse for his guilt, which—revolving the strange vagaries of superstition he had lately witnessed—it seemed not impossible that Lucrezia might have seduced him into, to secure more easily the pardons which her enormous crimes demanded, and which the church had confided to him! There were moments in this meditation,—when his indignation swelled the highest—that he blamed himself for not accepting her invitation, ascertaining her full

depravity, and humbling her with a scorn and refusal which, if aught could, would strike shame and dismay into her haughty soul. It did not occur to the lofty Knight of St. John that the experiment might have proved dangerous.

His cogitations on this point were, however, interrupted by the sound of a tambour; and looking up from his reverie he perceived that the populace were gathering in a wide circle before the fountain, assembling like bees to the musical noise. In the centre—kept thus remote by the vigilance of an old woman and two half-savage Calabrians, well armed, who seemed to be the proprietors of the show—stood a young Sicilian girl preparing to dance, in whose beautiful form Alfonso suddenly remembered his nymph of the Corso. She belonged apparently to a class of damsels who were ordained under severe penalties to go masked, during all the religious festival, to protect the pilgrims from the influence of their baleful charms; for there could be no other reason why a wandering female jongleur or minstrel, who employed the talents which the harmonious climate of Italy lavishes at times on its poorest children, to earn a scanty living from the rude populace—should otherwise affect the modesty and concealment of the vizard which the girl wore, and which was, moreover, of a peculiar form, devised by the pious cardinal of Sienna, with demoniac features well calculated to scare curiosity. But her form, as she stood collecting the spectators with the ringing music of her tambour, in that graceful Sicilian costume, which still retains the characteristic elegance of

its Greek original, counteracted all that the hideous mask could do to persuade the gazers that she was hideous too—a form which would have furnished a model for the Muse of Love, and inventress of the dance, voluptuous Erato herself! Alfonso's imagination was perhaps influenced by the reverie in which he had been indulging, but it struck him that the fine proportions of the Sicilian's figure resembled those of Lucrezia's—nay, that they were more exquisitely and womanly soft than his memory recalled Queen Morgan le Fay's.

It was, therefore, an unalloyed, because not perilous delight, to gaze upon so perfect a specimen of nature's divinest workmanship; but while thus innocently amusing his disturbed fancies, the knight became aware that he had attracted the notice of the *ballerina*, for he encountered her eyes beaming at him with earnest attention, from the depths of a green and speckled mask, which was intended by its ordainer to represent the corruption of disease, but which the comic humour of the populace had transmuted into a pleasant association by calling such vizards—cardinal melons.

The ballerina started from a somewhat listless attitude into one of gaiety and animation when she saw how earnestly the knight surveyed her; and tripping lightly over the circle, she paused before him, and said in a voice whose music flowed to his heart in its mingled tenderness and humility, "Holy knight! this is a Christian day!—will it disdain you to dance the tarantella with a poor Sicilian sinner, for the love of Saint Rosalie?"

"Thou art like to make many for thine own, fair sister," replied the Hospitaller. "But I do not mask in this array, as perchance thou deemest, and as too many of my brethren do; and therefore it were but little seemly to behold a sinner in my weeds link in the dance with a sinner in thine."

While he spoke the knight gazed with such interest and curiosity in the masked visage of the ballerina that so much of her fair neck as was visible rosied all over.

"Nay, then, I must use my spells," she replied after a moment's thought, and glancing round the circle, which was now increased by many personages, among whom the toad of Calumny had squatted himself tranquilly in the foremost row to listen, and beings so opposite as a friar—who had paused on the skirts of the throng—and the devil himself, with his hoofs, tail, and horns, who was leaning elegantly on his pitchfork—were now assembled. "My spells!—to raise the dead, since love and pleasure are dead in thy dedicated soul!—mother, my mandolin."

The populace listened to this dialogue with the interest which the southern imagination takes in all displays of the sensual talents; and when the improvisatrice, for such she seemed to be from the impromptu subject of her lay, threw her tambour over her fine shoulders by its silver chain, and took the instrument which one of her attendants brought, the whole multitude stood hushed as lovers listening to a nightingale. The smile on her lips shone even through the mask, and indeed there was something of magic fascination in the effect which the tenderness and

sweetness of her tones produced as she said, tuning her mandolin, "But first you must answer me a question fairly—or I shall not know which of my spells to use, for, with some, memory hath the only sorceries—with others, hope!" And she began to sing in a voice of indescribable harmony the following verses—which the reader must not forget were sung in Italy—in the carnival—and at the close of the fifteenth century.

I.

"Know'st thou the pain—that is sweeter than pleasure?
The joy brightly sad as the sun's crimson parting?
That comes like the lightning—
All withering, or bright'ning!
And with serpents of fire flow the veins in its darting,
And the grief and the rapture are both without measure!"

II.

"Know'st thou the moment—when Love first Love meeting
Eyes mingle in music—glance lightens in glance?
When hearts vainly panting
Quaff all that was wanting,
And the dreams of desire link in ecstasied dance,
And Hope seems eternal—Alas! when most fleeting?"

The songstress paused, seemingly to await a reply to her question, amidst murmurs of delight; and there was a slight tremulous heaving in her bosom, as if she really expected it with anxiety. The first sounds of her voice fixed the attention of Alfonso, and not alone for its exquisite purity and sweetness, which arose like the musical murmur of a fountain,

descending in showers of silver warblings; for it seemed to him that, if he could ever have heard Lucrezia sing, the passionate playfulness of her spirit might have vented itself in similar strains. But his reply partook of the asperity which every recollection of her now kindled. "Dost imagine, pretty vagabond, such gossamer subtleties were like to find anchorage in a large, rude, and restless breast like this, which—thou hearest—I strike, and it answers only with a jangle of steel?"

"Nay, then it is worse with thee;—where the pure spirit comes not, the dark one will!" continued the ballerina, continuing her song in a voice of still more voluptuously penetrating and luxurious sweetness:—

III.

"Know'st thou the madness?—the storm of emotion,
When lips join their roses all fraught with the sun?
When Love in Love fuses
His essence, and loses
All passion—all feeling—all memory in one!—
And the calm that fills heaven—repose's rapt ocean?"

The melting softness of the ballerina's voice; the grace of her form; the humility of her attitude of entreaty; the subduing languor of the glowing twilight; his recent tumult of passions; a strange suspicion which entered his mind—must all be pleaded in excuse for the religious knight, when we confess that while the last dulcet notes of the stanza admirably imitated in their dying harmony the delicious serenity of the thought—he started up, and attempted

to clasp her in his arms, exclaiming, "Nay, but by even as sweet a place, thou shalt teach me thy sweetest science, or ere we part!"

"Thou hast forgotten, knight!—thou wearest the livery of holy St. John, as you admonished me but now!" said the ballerina, laughing with musical softness, but eluding the seizure with a grace and dexterity which raised an universal acclaim of delight and applause in the spectators. Pausing on perceiving that the discomfited knight had checked himself, and stood looking at her half in vexation and half in admiration and surprise, she continued laughingly, "Oh, I could teach thee a much sweeter lesson—but you men will never learn it, long as women have been trying to teach it on earth, poor souls!—There's none of ye all can answer 'Yea' to this turn in the tune!"

And then with a spiritual gaiety which yet mingled melancholy in its marvellous tenderness, she continued:—

IV.

"Know'st thou the bliss,—when, like flames in the light,
 Man's love melts in woman's, and shares its serene?
 When like odours of flowers
 From night's dewy bowers,
 Souls mingle in souls—and our softness, your might.
 Make the one Heaven intended,—Ah, would it had been!"

"And wilt thou teach me such a science as this!—Wherefore wear you then that mask?" returned the Hospitaller, striving to put the severity in his tones which was very far from being in his heart.

"To please—monsignor the cardinal of Sienna!"

replied the ballerina, with a curtsey and an archness in the expression which produced a general murmur of laughter, accompanied with cries of "Melons, melons, who'll buy?" from the representative of his satanic majesty. Then as if inspired by an influx of gaiety and derision, the enchanting ballerina laid her mandolin aside, and beating her tambour to a lively air, improvisated—what follows:—

"To prevent a schism,—
Though in this carnival,
By order of the cardinal
Reverendissime,
We wear masks as frightful as any in a dream,
Beneath it—I'll not say—
But if you ran away,
At the sight of a rose undoubtedly you scream!
So in the world's at large—
Stranger, listen now I charge!—
I am not—I swear it—I am not what I seem!"

These last words were pronounced with a fervour and even passion which more than ever excited the curiosity of Alfonso.

"I do believe it!—art must have perfected even so special a marvel of nature's handiwork!—and thou speakest the golden language of courts!" exclaimed he, gazing at her in incredulous amazement.

"The thing goes well," said he of the club-feet at this point. "What are those cursed Agonizants beginning their psalms for now?"

"It is yonder croaking Dominican!" said the toad of Calumny. "But he is silent again; he began with a Laudamus that stuck in his throat."

“ I’ll pitch him a stave to the tune !” returned the Evil One, blithely.

“ For all men’s miseries, but chiefly to see ’em
So thankful for wretchedness—*Laudamus Deum !*”

A distant chorus of bacchantes replied in dog Latin,

“ *Deus noster est ille quo primus
Vinum bibimus
Bacchus, Io !*”

“ Peace, peace, they are at it again—and the parley is to my taste !” shouted the fiend.

“ I doubt if Lucrezia herself sings better when she charms the rage out of Father Jupiter,” exclaimed the toad.

“ Well !—what wouldst thou—with me ?” said Alfonso, in a staggered and yet fascinated tone. The ballerina replied, as her wont was, in verse.

“ I would twine my thoughts in garlands—but the roses would betray,

With their blushes—wishes which—what is it I would say ?—
By your smiles, ah, ye guess !—then the lily, if I chose ?—

The lily’s pale with passion—tells truth like any rose !—
The yellow jacinth would declare some jealousy within !—

How shall I tell him—that I love !—without a deadly sin !”

“ It is a song which thou hast ready for all accosters.—How canst thou pretend to love me ?” returned the Hospitaller, in a tone which betrayed in its wavering the tumult within. “ But wherefore dost thou shrink away thus ?”

“ Nay, if thou wilt not dance with me, I must look for another partner, for my mother grows impatient, as you may see by the twirling of her girdle,” returned the ballerina pettishly. “ I never cared who

'twas before—and now, merely because I like you, you hate me!”

“Thou knowest it is the bite of a poisonous spider which the tarantella dances away;—kiss me, then, thou lovely serpent, and perchance I shall go mad too!” returned the fascinated Hospitaller.

“Nay, 'tis not a Sicilian custom for the women to give—but for the men to take!” said the dancing-girl, with a pretty disdain glowing over so much of her complexion as was visible.

“Neither, by my faith, shall it be mine!” exclaimed the vanquished Knight of St. John, darting forward to grasp his prey, as he imagined; but again eluding him, she fled before him in a maze of the most graceful movements, which mingled at once allurements and laughing refusal. The knight pursuing with a resolution to capture her, and involuntarily following her rapid evolutions in the attempt, quite naturally and unconsciously performed his part in the dance—which like most southern dances expressed the amorous coquetry of two lovers, who alternately woo and disdain with the mute language of gesture and voluptuous motion. And, to complete her mockery of his efforts, the ballerina continued to sing even amidst all the velocity and vagaries of her dance.

V.

“Yes! till Time snatches Youth's wine-cup away,
Breathless, we'll quaff every draught of delight!
 Wreathing the hours
 Like a garland of flowers,
Only of those that are fragrant and bright,
And fresh with the gold-dews of Love or of May!”

Adding with a continual variety of laughing music,

“ But kisses are showers
That should fall but by night ! ”

The merriment of the spectators at his continual failures in entrapping the nimble ballerina, who celebrated her escapes with triumphant changes in the lively air on the tambour to which she accompanied her evolutions, seemed to bring the Hospitaller to a sense of the ridicule in his position. But in reality it only inspired him with an artful ruse. He feigned now to perform his part in the dance of love in a legitimate fashion: he retreated, and the nymph—somewhat warily at first—came treading the air with wooing gestures, expressive of despair, or hope, or tender entreaty. After long coyness on the lover's part, the damsel in her turn grows scornful and indignant, and retires. The lover then repents, and kneels for forgiveness, when like a butterfly returning in fluttering circles to a flower from which it has been frightened, the damsel gradually approaches him.

Brilliantly and gracefully as light playing on circles in the water, and with as rapidly sparkling steps, did the young dancing-girl return. The genius of pleasure animated her every movement, and breathed such essences of delight around her that the sunset air seemed like a rosy emanation from her beauty filling all heaven and earth with fragrance and colour.

The wily Hospitaller concealed the throbbing of his heart, and affected to kneel, and go through his

loving pantomime with little more than the customary gestures expressive of passion and submission. The disdainful circles narrowed, and the beautiful form swam nearer and nearer in his intoxicated gaze—and still he controlled his impatience. The populace looked on with increased delight, struck with the incongruous attitude of the religious knight, and testified their enthusiasm with an uproar of joyful shouts and exclamations. Showers of silver, and even gold, which fell in the circle, showed that the jubilants had not exhausted their resources in pious contributions, and were greedily collected by the old woman and her comrades; while several masked magnificoes who joined the crowd whispered the hag, and gave her rings and other rich pledges, all which she accepted, and seemed to repay the donors in a less substantial coin of promises.

But the Hospitaller's moment had now arrived, when the relenting fair one at length concluded her mazy circles by forming one with her arms over his head, in token of forgiveness. But instead of rising and concluding the dance with the usual reverse of matters, the knight threw his arm dexterously round her waist, and fairly captured the brilliant fugitive.

“Our dance is not on equal terms, for thou canst see in my face how my wrath is but feigned, while thine is hidden!” he said, trembling with eagerness. “Let me remove thy mask, and behold if there be two faces on earth to match that matchless form!—Moreover, for mine order's sake, I will teach thee henceforth not to throw resistless temptations in the way of holy men!” And he strained the soft form

with such violence to his breast that he probably hurt the unfortunate ballerina against the iron plates whose janglings he had boasted, for she uttered a faint cry, and called out in great terror, "Mama Faustina, rescue!—carnival, carnival!" And before the words were well uttered, the old woman with her two Calabrians, the latter with daggers drawn, rushed towards them. The mob also raised the shout of "Carnival, carnival!" and seemed to project a forcible rescue. The uproar changed the nature of the ballerina's alarm.

"In our Holy Mother's name, forbear!" she exclaimed, waving to the Calabrians and the mob to keep off, and turning to her capturer she murmured in a tone of almost abject entreaty, "Release me, noble knight!—indeed I am not what I seem—and to be recognized would be my ruin!—Nay, I will confess all!—I am a waiting damsel of my Lady Donna Lucrezia—and have but put this jest upon you to know whether you hated all womankind, or only so bad a one!"

"Thou hast stolen her rosy fragrance too!" muttered the amazed Hospitaller. "But that it is impossible!—or is she indeed a sorceress!—Whatever chance I will satisfy this doubt!"

"Mercy, dearest knight!—thou knowest 'tis a grievous flagellation to be seen without my cardinal melon!" murmured the ballerina, with a return of the wiling witchery to her tones, and attempting, but in vain, to glide from his arms.

"Oh, if thou art not she—I will prove by loving thee more than all womankind that I hate not all!"

exclaimed the bewildered Hospitaller. "And thou art not—it cannot be—yonder the fiendish enchantress comes!" and half releasing her, he gazed like one in a distempered dream towards the Corso, along which, attended by a concourse of admiring gazers, the procession of Fata Morgana was passing.

"Certes, I am not yonder sumptuous lady—my mistress!" returned the prisoner, tremulously, but with exceeding eagerness.

"Release the harlot!—how darest thou—thou, a soldier of the church!—to break the commands of the Apostolic Lieutenant!" exclaimed a husky voice, while a strong hand grasped the shoulder of the knight, who turned and beheld the Dominican, Fra Bruno, whose countenance flamed with fanatic wrath.

"Ay, and it hath come to my turn to rescue damsels, and moreover to serve the church!" added another speaker, in fierce tones, whom Alfonso recognized instantly to be Oliverotto da Fermo, although he was disguised in an extraordinary paraphernalia of gilt scales, contrived to make him resemble a huge fish moving about on its tail. But luckily his only weapon appeared to be an enormous hook, baited with a doll, on which was inscribed, with dullard wit, "To catch Bears." This, however, he held high and menacingly in the air.

"Friar, look to your ally, if such he be—lest I do what I should have done the other night, and make a very harmless rogue of him!" said Alfonso, not abandoning his clutch of the ballerina with one hand, though he grasped his sword with the other.

"Peace, Oliverotto!—is it indeed the Knight of

the Holy Sepulchre?" returned the monk, drawing his ally forcibly back. "Let the woman go, good son!—you know the cardinal's decree,—and it disgraces you!"

"I did but rebuke her for the scandal she would have brought on my livery.—It is fit to punish her by removing her mask," said the knight, somewhat confusedly.

"Nay, father, by the bruises which still ache me all over, I will return my wrong, and rescue the wench!" said Oliverotto, again raising his massive hook. The monk and some bystanders interposed, partly with words, and partly by forcing themselves between.

"Now, then, I am like to have good sport—a monk, a woman, and a soldier!—I require no more to set the world in a blaze," said the club-footed mask, grasping his pitchfork as if prepared to take a share in the riot.

"Knight!—I implore thee!—Release me, and I swear thou shalt behold my face without any mask, even of glass!" whispered the ballerina, with passionate entreaty, amidst the noisy tumult of expostulations and rage. "I would not be known to yonder monk for all the world!"

"Ay!—but by what oath wilt thou swear—which even Lucrezia Borgia would not dare to break," returned the knight.

"By the desire I have to see thee again!" replied the ballerina, pouring the blue lightning of her eyes from her mask with a mixture of terror and laughing indignation into those of the obdurate Hospitaller.

"The when and the where?" he replied, hurriedly, and completely bewildered with the expression of those brilliant eyes, which for the first time throughout the scene had fully encountered his own.

"Be at the gate of San Sebastian when the moon is three hours older—Faustina shall guide you thence to my abode—in the grotto of Egeria!" returned the ballerina, falteringly.

"The grotto of Egeria!—the gardens of Lucrezia Borgia!" exclaimed the knight.

"Ay, but each of her favourites has a key—and I am one; you need not fear to meet my devilish mistress there to-night!" exclaimed the ballerina. "She is wickedly busy elsewhere; you can believe that?"

But, at this moment, the cry among the people warned Alfonso that the Lord of Fermo's indignation had at length mastered every effort to restrain him; and whirling round to defend himself, he was thus compelled to release the gleemaiden, or whatever she might be called. But instead of making the use which might be expected of her liberty, she shrieked wildly to the monk, yet in a voice which struck the Hospitaller as simulated, to part the fray in the name of all the saints, and the obligations of the Jubilee.

"Villain of Fermo!—get thee arms, and I will satiate justice upon thee," said the Hospitaller, half unsheathing his sword.

"Beware, beware!—yonder comes Donna Lucre-

zia, with all her attendance," continued the ballerina, in a strangely altered voice. "Christ's peace, Christ's peace! all of ye keep it, in the name of our Lord, the Pope, and the Church."

"Yes, it is Donna Lucrezia! — 'tis but a witness the more of the chastisement thou shouldst receive, assassin!" shouted Alfonso, still unwilling to draw his sword against the hook of the ruffianly baron.

"Lucrezia!—yonder?" repeated the monk, gazing earnestly in the direction indicated, and as the procession was now approaching, the elephant was visible, with the fairy enthroned in her castle on it. And, moreover, the glistening figure of Sir Reginald was seated beside her, as if in triumph; while the magnificent pageant of the Orsini surrounded it, and peals of music shook the air. Fra Bruno stepped forward, and in that brief pause the light-stepped ballerina had disappeared.

Oliverotto also looked somewhat alarmedly at the approaching spectacle. "Since thou knowest me, I care not to find myself among a crowd of Borgians, with a pretext for a seizure," he said to the Hospitaller. "But, trust me, we will meet some day where there shall be no interruption. Meanwhile I have given thee an olive for a fig—the girl is gone—and so, for the nonce, farewell."

The Lord of Fermo then turned on his heels—for heels he had below his fan-like tail; and Alfonso, much less anxious to pursue his quarrel than to ascertain who the fascinating ballerina was, turned

eagerly to look after her. But she was gone—she and her attendants—and in the agitation of the tumult no one had noticed whither. Fra Bruno himself deigned to make inquiries on this subject, and finding them in vain, hurriedly moved off towards the pomp of Queen Morgan le Fay.

CHAPTER VIII.

"In vallem Egeriæ descendimus et speluncas
Dissimiles veris."

JUVENAL.

We have descended into the valley of Egeria,
And her rocks unlike the real ones.

"'Tis a most lovely light-of-love you have lost, signor, by this clinking of metal,—yet it is not often that Mars frightens away Venus," said he of the cloven hoofs, accosting the Hospitaller as he was looking in vain for his fugitive partner.

"The devil can speak truth, they say; but I believed it not until now," replied the knight. "If I mistake not, I speak to Messer Niccolò of Florence?"

"Even to no better a man—when my mask is off," replied the ambassador, suiting the action to the word.

"Have you seen this singing-wench before?—Know you aught of her?" said the knight with much anxiety.

"You should have asked me these questions ere I drew off my mask," replied Messer Niccolò,

smilingly. "But although 'tis certain it swims in my memory that I have seen her elsewhere, I trust the fiend I represent has forgotten as much as I have—where."

"Tis strange!" mused Alfonso. "The same thought has occurred to me.—Marked you, Messer, the magnificent show of Donna Lucrezia to-day?—As the enchantress Morgana?—and in very truth I deem she is a sorceress, and can be in two places at once!"

"The enchantress Morgana!—the personage with whom our fellow-traveller, Sir Reginald—by our lady! he is like to prove the Adonis then of our modern Venus!" exclaimed Machiavelli. "I saw him seated beside her in her castle, and there was a sweet love-toying going on as ever I noted in two billing doves!—The luck of these boys is marvellous."

"But yet I think—I doubt—I am sure it could not be Donna Lucrezia!" said Alfonso, hurriedly.

"I have but your authority for supposing so, signor," replied Machiavelli, smiling. "Yet 'tis no harm to say that if she it was, I envy the English barbarian his place more than the cherubim theirs!"

"I had rather change it with one of your courtiers below, master devil!" said the toad, who had squatted himself familiarly near the interlocutors. "It were the cooler place."

"Ha, Calumny!—tell us the worst thou canst of her; we are in a mood to believe all now," said Alfonso, affecting indifference and hilarity.

"The worst I know of her is very good," replied the toad, grinning. "Her virtues are carried to excess—that is all. She is a daughter only too dutiful—a sister only too affectionate—a Christianella only too universal in her love!"

"Have a care thou dost not some day see thy tongue in a dish before thee!" said Messer Niccolò.

"I should marvel if I saw my eyes out—that is all, in Rome," replied the toad. "But I will hence where my conversation is more like to be appreciated, for yonder knight is as fast asleep with his eyes open as ever I was with mine shut, though I slept very soundly last night in the portico of the Orsini palace—for since his holiness frowned the other day, the resort has not been great thither."

Alfonso was indeed absorbed in a reverie which all the cynical wit of Machiavelli, though at present much to his humour, could not dissipate. He began to imagine himself under the influence of some species of nympholepsy, for in spite of his conviction that Lucrezia was the enchantress of the fairy pageant, in spite of the marvellous improbability that so proud and lofty a lady would mingle in the wild revelry in so lowly a disguise—it haunted him that the Sicilian ballerina was Lucrezia herself!

Notwithstanding the improbability, not to say impossibility, of this supposition, at times he cherished it, when he dwelt on Machiavelli's allusion to Sir Reginald's treatment by the fairy, Morgana; then again it troubled him inconceivably to think that Lucrezia and the ballerina were not one and the

same! But when the Florentine had left him, to share in the diversions which were to conclude the day's amusements, and he had leisure to recall the indescribable fascinations to which he had been subjected, his fancy warmed so glowingly in the recollection, that—he came to the conclusion that his only motive in resolving most religiously to keep his appointment was to be well assured the ballerina was not Lucrezia!

In this mood it may be imagined with what impatience he watched the gradual rising of the moon, which showed herself not in the least inclined to hurry on his account. Three hours after, according to the ballerina's compact, he was to present himself at the gate of San Sebastian, to await her messenger. But it cannot be denied that during that long lapse—immeasurable it seemed to the Hospitaller—when his mind reverted to the supposition of her identity with Lucrezia, some chilling doubts came over the sultry reverie. If the lady of the Borgias was indeed the dreadful being she was represented—animated by passions so terrific—might she not meditate vengeance for the affronts he had put upon her? And, moreover, what if the Dominican had communicated the purpose of his alleged embassy from Ferrara, — was not that alone sufficient to kindle her haughty blood into flame; or might he not have communicated to others, still more merciless, to whom detection and exposure were still more formidable? And when he remembered the spot assigned for the interview—gardens with which Lucrezia had embellished the beautiful valley con-

secrated by the legend of the Roman lawgiver and his nymph—the tales of the Neapolitan poets occurred to him, whose wanton imaginations revelled in descriptions of the secret haunts of pleasure which they ascribed to Lucrezia, like those of the enchantresses of old. Not satisfied with imputing to her every lascivious excess, in these bowers, they pretended that the only distinction between her and the ancient Circe was, that the latter contented herself with transforming the lovers of whom she was weary into beasts and reptiles, while the former secured the silence of hers in a much more efficacious manner.

But such was the ardour of discovery in the knight's breast, that no consideration of danger had influence with him ; and nearly an hour before the appointed one his shadow walked darkly beside him over the desert Aventine. The sight of the ruins in which Fra Bruno dwelt rekindled some of his wildest fancies, and he paused with a degree of irresolution ; but a sweet breath of roses blown to his lips by a chance breeze so forcibly recalled one of the most insidious charms of the ballerina, that he hastened on, wondering at his own hesitation. The way was nearly solitary until he passed the magnificent temple of St. John Lateran, which was crowded with devotees ; and the Hospitaller felt a vague feeling of remorse and apprehension steal over his heart as he glided past the shrines of the saint, the garb of whose martial professors he had assumed, bound on such an errand, and heard the lugubrious chaunt of the funeral mass which, even on this day of her triumph, the

church dedicated to her fifteen hundred years of departed faithful.

Passing through the gate of San Sebastian, the open Campagna was before him—a sea of long, flowery grass broken only by remote arches of ruined aqueducts, or a few solitary tombs, and bounded by wave-like mountains whose tops shone silvery in the moonlight. The only living objects visible were a few sheep or goats; the only sounds audible were distant warblings of shepherds' pipes, who diverted themselves by night after the traditional manner of their Arcadian predecessors. The sky was still tinged with glowing tints towards the west, and the solemn heads of one or two solitary pines had not quite abandoned the reflection. The contrast of the purity and serenity of nature to his turbulent passions somewhat restored the Hospitaller's reason. He strove to disgust himself by recalling the lascivious pictures which the Neapolitan satires presented of Lucrezia and her court; and almost imagined that he had resolved to depart, without waiting to see the result of the adventure, when he beheld the old woman approaching whom the ballerina called Faustina, and in a contrary direction from the city. Now was the moment to put his determination in practice—instead of which he hurried forward to meet her.

“O, my son, is it thou! well, God be praised! you are very early; but they do say lovers' feet are not asses', and 'tis all the better, for disappointment comes soon enough, and I bring it,” said the old woman much agitated, and seemingly out of breath.

Alfonso's virtuous resolutions vented themselves only in an echo full of the meaning of the word. "Disappointment! what mean you, mother? It is impossible—here is gold. She promised, she swore to let me behold her face without a mask—which is all that I ask! A few moments will suffice, and in your presence."

"Fie upon thee, son!—gold!—for what dost thou take me? Nay, if I take them, it must be to offer to the Jubilee, for indeed I have only bestowed two candles for the good of my soul," said the beldame, with indignation, but pocketing the coins. "Yet understand me, my son; I tell you, it is impossible—unless we put all our heads in a lion's mouth. Thou wilt believe me when I tell thee, my poor son, that my lord the Duke of Romagna has taken a caprice for our ballerina, and sent her a lapful of ducats, and word that it is his pleasure to hear her sing some of her pretty songs to-night!"

Alfonso was instantly struck with the incongruity of this statement with that which the ballerina had communicated to him of her real rank; and his second thought was one that thrilled through his blood like the scorpion's bite. The old woman probably mistook the nature of his agitation, imputing it to the terror which so formidable a rival was likely to produce.

"And where doth she attend him—in his palace?" said the Hospitaller, taking refuge in the thought that it was not unusual in great households, at festivals, to invite such persons as the ballerina to entertain the guests with their talents. "You came in the

direction, and I heard that—she promised me an interview in the gardens of Lucrezia Borgia !”

“Lucrezia Borgia ! marry, where learned you that familiarity ?” said Faustina, somewhat disconcertedly staring at the knight. “It is the most illustrious Lady Donna Lucrezia who gives the feast, at which our ballerina is to sing by the duke’s command ; but the feast is not to be till the night is older—and meanwhile I go to inform his highness that he is obeyed, for my daughter is there.”

“Why there are yet a few precious minutes ; hobble a little on thy way, and I shall have become air ere ye return !” said Alfonso, with infinite eagerness, and seconding his entreaties with the more eloquent persuasions of gold.

“In very sooth thou deservest not to be so wretched, my beloved son, whom I cherish like my first-born, or the sweet lady I reared with my own milk, wicked old wretch that I am !” said Faustina, unguardedly, and with something of remorse in her tones. “An if she dared, she would have been as glad to see you as your mother from a battle—and ten times gladder. But thou knowest—the Duke of Romagna is no fool’s bladder, that hits and gives no headaches.”

“I know the peril I run ; and therefore ’tis certain I shall not delay to fall into it,” returned the Hospitaller.

“Oh, but lovers never hear vespers rung. Moreover, she would be mad if she thought I had betrayed her secret—for the poor soul loves you so, she would fain have you believe—that she loves people for no-

thing," continued the disgusting old wretch, and yet there was something in the thought which touched Alfonso, for he felt certain it could not have originated in the mind of the beldame.

"I promise you by—nothing holy indeed—but may all the sins that have brought men to this Jubilee be imputed to me, if I betray thee," returned the knight. "I will feign some excuse—or rather, in very truth, I go only to put a scorn upon her for her vileness in attempting to corrupt one of my order."

Faustina glanced at him with a look which only a Roman hag can give, her black eyes flaming like gassy coals; and then she burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, which subsided only in an as immoderate a fit of coughing.

"Bones of holy January! to hear him talk!" she exclaimed. "But in good faith, I was thinking thou wert little less than mad to come on a love adventure armed cap-à-pie! Yes, my sweet child, I will trust thee—nothing could have fallen better. Go on thy way; if any note thee, they will take thee for an officer of the duke. Here is a pass-key; thou hast but to follow the windings of the garden to a grotto where she is—or will come very shortly, for indeed I have lighted on you sooner than I expected."

"Go on thy way, then, too, and I shall know that I have no time to lose," replied the Hospitaller, hastening from the society of the ballerina's respectable parent. "When we meet again I will double what I have given thee."

"I am old, sir knight, but note that I go at a good

step !” screamed the beldame, setting off, indeed, at a pace into which she could, perhaps, scarcely have been whipped on a better errand.

Thus, then, were all his riddles simplified to the fortunate envoy—he had but to ascertain without a doubt that the ballerina was Lucrezia Borgia, which, he now discovered, he had all along believed.

The way was not unknown to him, and taking a path which branched off to the left, he arrived among some ruins, apparently of a temple, which crowned a steep unnoticed in the general wave of the Campagna towards Naples. Below lay a wooded valley, into which he began to descend, after passing through a gate in a hedge of aloes, matted together with every species of odorous climbing plant.

The thoughts which Alfonso ruminated were certainly not inspired by the genius of the place. The enervating perfume of flowers saluted him on every side, for the underwood of the bank which he descended by an ingenious labyrinth of windings to the valley beneath was formed of fragrant shrubs, and the most richly coloured and scented productions of the profuse Flora of Italy. The myrtle, laden with thoughts of love, glittered tearfully in the moonlight; lavender breathed its fine essences with the benign perfume of the bay; roses innumerable filled the air with their heavenly breath, and their dewy crimson reminded Alfonso—and yet with a shudder—of Lucrezia’s perfect mouth. The wood itself was chiefly of oranges, cedar, and wild fig-trees, all in full blossom, and exhaling the most intoxicating odours, intermingled with a few stately oaks, the graceful

foliage of the willow and laburnum, or slender boles of the ash and sycamore, gleaming high in the silvery air.

From the depth of the valley came the musical murmur of a stream, mingled with the songs of innumerable nightingales which seemed to have colonized so congenial a residence. And if his ear did not mock him, the knight distinguished faint murmurs of flutes and other sylvan music, which came and died away on the evanescent breezes. Withal there was an air of wildness, as if nature only had abandoned herself to this profusion of loveliness, and no trace of art was obvious to break the spell with which it delighted the senses. Even the statues of rural divinities which occasionally appeared, startled rather by a vague impression of existence and reality, than as wonders of artificial creation.

Descending through this bosquet of Eden, Alfonso came to a dell at its base on a bank of the stream whose verdure was—to use a worn-out phrase, but here literally true—enamelled with flowers. The moon shone so brightly that the superb tints of those myriad blooms were softened, but not lost in the shade; even the dark violets displayed their purple, edged with golden light. The stream flowed through the middle of the valley in a gentle, copious, and perfectly translucent wave, bordered on the other side by a similar meadow, and another climbing wood.

As yet the Hospitaller had not encountered a single living thing; but so absorbed was he in his dark thoughts that he never once noticed the circumstance until he reached the edge of the stream, and paused

in doubt which way to turn. But remembering that its spring flowed from the grotto of Egeria, he turned his steps against the stream, and proceeded, sometimes kicking away in impatience the broad aquatic flowers which willowed from their waters over the edge. A little higher the waters formed a cascade, over which the statues of Flora and Pomona bent towards one another, entwining flowers and fruit, as if gracefully exchanging presents, into an arch. Beyond the cascade the meadow opened in a circular form, and immediately in front arose a lofty bank in which appeared the mossy entrance to the grotto of Egeria, whence flowed the perennial fountain by whose waters, three thousand years ago, the Roman law-giver had caught inspiration from the lips of love.

Taste was as yet a word unapplied in its modern sense, but the poetical imagination of the fair restorer of this solitude was one of those from which its rules might have been deduced. Art only imitated the affluent caprices of nature in the adornment of this charmed retreat. The rocks overhead preserved their native moss; the wild vine clambered with the wild rose and still wilder fig-tree, ostentatiously spreading its large flame-coloured blossoms among their crags; drops dribbled through the interstices, and streamed down the long green hair of the creeping plants which hung from their fissures. Even the profusion of sweet-scented flowers seemed only to prove that nature herself had taken an exceeding delight in the place, and had decked it with her most lavish magnificence for her own retreat from the glowing suns of her beloved Italy.

The Knight of St. John paused at the entrance of the grotto, though the archways of honeysuckle hanging over it, stirred by the breeze, shook the sugared dew from their sea-shell coloured bells in his face, as if to refresh and invite him in. It was not any wavering of purpose—he had determined, at whatever risk, to learn who the ballerina was—but he was struck with amazement at the silence and magic solitude which seemed to reign in the supremely beautiful scene before him, where he had expected to find Lucrezia and the ministers of her direful pleasures.

The traveller who at this day visits the valley of Egeria will be reversely disappointed to the great Roman satirist who went away execrating all that art had done in the embellishment of the poetical site: he will miss the natural charms with which the imagination of Lucrezia had wrought out the sweet fable of the antique world. Time and barbarous hands have been at work, defacing, and scarcely so much of Lucrezia's retreat remains as the knight beheld forming a grotto over the fountain at the opposite extremity before him. The rest was an irregular dome, composed of slender twigs matted with vines, honeysuckles, and other twining plants, supported as on pillars of verdure by the trunks of the trees up which they climbed, and walled with moss and espaliers of flowers, sometimes admitting some uncertain flickers from without, but in general excluding all exterior light. Yet this was rendered unnecessary by the soft and milky radiance of an alabaster lamp, shaped like a moon suspended, no one could tell by

what means, in the herbage above the fountain, while a flight of Cupids seemed endeavouring to veil its light from streaming into the waters below, and revealing the robeless loveliness of the nymph Egeria, rising from it, with her finger on her lips, and looking timidly up to the radiance of her betrayed mistress. Alfonso's gaze was instantly fixed by the certainty which he felt that the statue whose beauties were thus lavishly displayed in the polished snow of the marble, was moulded from Lucrezia's exquisite form!—an enthusiasm of devotion to the art, not so surprising in that age of its revival as in our own, in which it has been emulated, but which made Alfonso gnash his teeth in a frenzy of admiration and despair.

The soft effulgence of the lamp reflected in silver from the bosom of the broad bason into which the fountain fell with a perpetual music, and which overflowing its margin streamed through the centre of the cavern over white sand and inlaid pebbles and spars of bright tints, enabled Alfonso to perceive that he was alone in it. Some preparations for a feast indeed were visible, such as wine piled in snow, and some light gilded tables set with brilliant crystals; a lyre of antique form lay near the fountain; and Alfonso bitterly noted the many couches of flowery moss, which would indeed have furnished forth fit resting places for the nymphs who were supposed to haunt the cave, and yet whose softness and fragrance those of Cytherea need not have disdained.

Forgetting his own earliness, Alfonso instantly concluded, that not expecting the Duke of Romagna

for some time, the successor of Egeria had not yet arrived in her beautiful haunt. The thought then struck him that he had the means of ascertaining the reality of his suspicions beyond the cavil of doubt, or fear of disappointment, which was very likely to meet him if he attempted any open satisfaction of his curiosity, now that Lucrezia must be awakened to the danger of detection. At terrible hazard, indeed ! but his resolution was wrought to a kind of frenzy, and he looked round for some means of concealing himself so as to witness the expected interview unseen. The solitude throughout the valley had no doubt been purposely ordained to secure it from such observation ; but at least it assured him that, even in case of detection, he should not be assailed by numbers.

Glaring eagerly around, Alfonso perceived that the rocks of the cavern were broken at various elevations by little caves and narrow terraces of rock, blooming with flowers or shadowed with drooping foliage, all in profuse blossom, which were reached by playful zigzags irregularly cut as if to mock the efforts of a climber. But the diversion of mounting them seemed seldom used, for the musk which covered them was untrodden, and in many places briar-roses and jasmine had so twisted over, that the rural nymphs themselves would have had some difficulty in mounting even to rob a bee-hive, or to regain a fugitive dove. But the Hospitaller was of sturdier make, and besides gave himself no time for deliberation, for selecting one of the higher ledges, in which yawned a spar-glittering cave, and which was

thrown into shadow by a profusion of laurels in their full purple flowers, at some distance from the fountain, but commanding a view of the whole interior of the grotto, he tore rather than clambered his way up to it. Heedless of the possibility of finding some inhospitable denizens in the cave, he couched down in it on a bed of iris and basil, whose sweetness vainly wooed his notice, into which he thrust his limbs, peering out like a wild animal from its haunt, and with feelings little less ferocious. Remembering that his white hood might attract notice, he pushed it back, and drew his hair as much as possible over his face, so that there was little probability that he could be discerned in the deep shadow.

Some time elapsed, during which not a sound but the throbbings of his own heart met the Hospitaller's strained sense; but anon he thought he heard a distant murmur of female voices, mingled with the light, brilliant laughter of the sex—that flame on the straw of their flimsy fantasies, kindled and gone! But it died away almost immediately; and after a considerable pause of expectation, Alfonso was about to indulge himself with a full inhalation into his half-smothered chest, when he distinguished a soft and rapid footfall approaching. The step seemed somewhat to hesitate on entering the grotto, but as if reassured by the silence, a female form glided in.

The grace and lightness of her movement, and the rounded beauty of the figure, convinced Alfonso that he beheld the ballerina, although she had changed her costume to one purely Grecian, the loose robes of which, of some shimmering and exquisitely fine

tissue of silk, of the most delicate tints of the sky-colours in a sea-shell, floated round her, scarcely confined by the coral clasps on her fair shoulders and her cincture of glistening mother-of-pearl, leaving the arms and feet bare, except where the latter were sandalled with silver. Alfonso remarked the golden hue of her now loosened hair, which was ornamented with a wreath of small crimson water flowers common in Italy, twisted with the glossy green leaves and white aromatic flower of the myrtle; but still, to Alfonso's surprise and vexation, she wore a mask, the relentless cardinal melon!—in all other appearances as lovely a naiad as ever bedecked her beauty in the mirror of her native fountain.

After satisfying herself, apparently by a glance round the grotto, that none but her fair self was in it, the ballerina approached the fountain, sat down on its margin—sighed—took up her lyre, played a few wavering, pettish notes—threw it aside—and finished as women always do on like occasions, by endeavouring to ascertain how she looked in the watery glass beside her. Another timid listening—and she drew off her mask! The countenance blooming with the loveliest tints of youth and beauty, now heightened with the glow of agitated passions, could belong to none but Lucrezia Borgia!—And she it was.

But for the dire circumstances of the assignation which had brought this proof before him, Alfonso's delight would have been extreme to discover that she could not possibly be identical with the licentious Fairy Morgana. Now it added only a new bitterness to his cup of wormwood. And yet—as if the

daughter of the Borgias had been aware of the fuel she was heaping on fire, and took her revenge with the metaphysical cruelty of her sex and nation, not satisfied with the survey of her charming face, something in the posure of her robes seemed to displease her, and she unclasped the neck, and leisurely arranged her white cobweb-fine linen round her bosom—fair as the tints of a blush rose with its coral buds peeping among the fragrant whiteness. So perfect it was that even her own beauty seemed to delight herself, or the vague deliciousness of love made all things lovely alluring, or its superior coolness made it pleasant,—but she leaned her warm cheek on her shoulder, fondling them together as Venus might her doves,—lightly kissed one wave-like heaving of its moony neighbour, and then laughed, tenderly and sweetly, and yet with a playful derision, as if she were mocking some unseen lover (and was she not?) as she fastened the vest.

Her attitude now—as she sat with the mask in her hand, impatiently listening—was only a new variation of beauty, in the graceful contour into which the gesture threw her head and pliant limbs, which Phidias himself could but have imitated. Then her glance fell on the mask—and she slapped its hideous visage with the disdain of beauty, then seemed to be striving to make it prettier by rubbing and smoothing some of its asperities—then she dipped her hand in the fountain and wrote in its waters a name—Alfonso could not discern what, but doubted not that it was Cæsar,—then in a renewed fit of impatience and playfulness she heaped abundant showers on the

statue of herself—so unclad in the fountain, as if Love had taught her his divinest mystery of modesty. She listened again, and Alfonso thought he could discern the beatings of her heart through her ærial robe;—a bird chirruped, and she started up, her face flushing a bright crimson—silence followed—and she turned with a species of scorn and haughtiness from the undarkened threshold. Another pause, and, as if overcome by impatience, she moved rapidly from the fountain to the entrance of the grotto, and looked forth. To Alfonso's deep satisfaction she returned disappointedly, sat down on one of the mossy couches, and played for a moment with her thick waving ringlets;—then she covered her eyes with her hand, and then—like a pettish thing as she was, and unaccustomed to the least thwarting—a shower of tears bedewed her cheek—were dried indignantly away,—and she sunk languidly down on the verdant couch, as if quite vanquished by the weariness of expectation. There was some little rest thus, joining her soft hands and circling her arms over her head; but the inquietude of passion returned; she kissed the misnamed heart's-ease and mignonette of her pillow with vague rapture—started up, gathered a nosegay of the poor flowers, covered them with kisses, and pressed them with devouring tenderness to her lips and bosom,—then threw them disdainfully away. Another April shower—another restless rest—and then with a tumultuous blush she sprang up from the couch. Footsteps were audible, and in an instant she had covered her face with the mask—regained the

fountain—and sat on its margin apparently as calm and passionless as the statue in its waves.

There was something of madness in the mingling of emotions with which Alfonso watched these irrefragable signs of kindled passion—these preparations for the reception of his monstrous rival! He who approached came stealthily as a leopard, but his footfall was sufficiently audible to the lady, who, however, looked not in the direction, and began to murmur a little melody, so that but for the throbbing of her bosom it could not have been thought that she noticed it. The figure of a cavalier, very splendidly garbed and masked, appeared at the entrance of the grotto of Egeria, and paused for an instant as if to survey the interior; and his figure, which largely partook of the beauty and elegance of his race, but above all, the demoniac glitter of his eyes, as his gaze fell on that of the ballerina, informed Alfonso that he beheld the Duke of Romagna.

It was a moment of almost mortal agony in the heart of the prince, and clutching his dagger, and closing his eyes, he drew himself up with all but the resolution to rush forth, and rid Italy and humanity of a monster who but usurped its form—when his purpose was checked by hearing a faint exclamation, almost amounting to a stifled shriek, from the ballerina. Alfonso's heart stood still with excess of emotion as he opened his eyes, and saw that the nymph seemed struggling to free her hand from the grasp in which Cæsar held it in both of his own, kneeling at her feet, and muttering excuses in a most lover-

like and dulcet tone, as if deprecating her displeasure.

“ ’Tis false—’tis false, cavalier !—I await no one—or but my mistress, Donna Lucrezia !—who indeed will be here upon the instant ! ” exclaimed the ballerina, in a terrified and even horror-struck tone. “ Begone, begone ! We are not so lonely as you think !—these gardens swarm with my friends !—I would not that any should find you here, for all I own or hope on earth or in heaven ! ”

“ Tush, tush, my fairest unknown !—What then when I tell thee that I heard thy beldame whisper thy laggard love—the Knight of St. John ?—heard him refuse thy gentle invitation with loathing and abhorrence—pucker-browed monk as he is !—and bethought myself to come in his place ;—for the bold in love are favoured by Venus for the sake of her valiant lover, the god of war ! ” returned Cæsar.

“ Refused !—loathing !—abhorrence ! ”—exclaimed the ballerina, in a half-stifled voice. “ It is impossible !—and yet it is !—Why then, why then,—I am glad — my soul is glad — since he disdains all women, not me alone !—I meant not that !—My mistress, Donna Lucrezia — ye have all seen how he despised and scorned her ! — desired but to learn, that she might revenge — planned a merry scoff—I, her handmaiden, what could I but obey ? ”

“ Ay, but she will do like great kings detected in base policies—deny her emissary,” replied Cæsar, in a strange tone, which mingled something of mad ferocity with its eagerness. “ And I tell thee—if thou

but dare again to soil her dignity with such an imputed share in thy offence—I will trumpet thy shame to all the world—to Rome, to the court, to the pontiff, to all Christendom—how being a woman, forsooth, a lady!—thou hast not blushed to disguise thyself as a harlot—to use all the blandishments of one—to win an unwilling stranger to thine arms!—Will not such a tale renown thee farther even than the dark supposal against thy mistress, Lucrezia—albeit that hath spread to every land like night?—Nay, they will believe yet worse of her, seeing what her handmaids are!—But do not shudder, nor meditate aught frantical, thou fairest of all Eve's daughters!—I mean not to pry into thy mask! But thou shalt not waste thy beauty and this loving hour because contemned by yonder clod of frosted clay!"

"Thou shalt not need to pry beneath my mask—behold, here is my face!" interrupted the ballerina, with a laugh of unutterable scorn and fury, and tearing off her mask, her features were visible, the eyes flaming, and her whole visage alight with passions the more terrible from the contrast of their fierceness with its beauty.

"Cæsar!—thou knowest me now! Depart, if thou wouldst not have me summon my court and guards, as with the least utterance I can!" she exclaimed, as the duke, feigning great astonishment, started up and retired several paces. "Go—I defy thee!—go with thy tale to whom or what thou wilt—or, to disprove it, 'tis enough that all this valley is filled with concealed troops of my friends, invited by me,—that here, and almost at this hour, I have con-

sented to receive the serenade of Paolo Orsino! So thou seest, subtle as they are, thy spies are at times at fault, and that a woman—fools and toys of caprice as thou deemest us;—but no, no, no!—I will believe thee!—thou art undeceived—I am myself—begone!”

“So, then, our fair sister, who finds such fault with the world for gossipry—really and verily is here on a rendezvous with a Knight of St. John?” said Cæsar, laughing with inexpressible bitterness.

“What if it be so?—what right hast thou to dispute my pleasure?” returned Lucrezia, passionately. “Art thou husband or father—and for brother—*brother*;—Oh, if thou rememberest, monster!—thou hast affirmed to me that thou art not my brother—a changeling at nurse—as would to God thou wert, that thy neck might feel the edge of the axe it hath deserved by out-deserving a million times!”

“I was mad once—delirious with the fever of my toils to raise our name to the grandeur which now environs it—and raved—and my sister reproaches me with my sufferings!” said the Duke, in a tone compounded of anger, fear, and feigned contrition.

“Ah, Cæsar!—would I could believe thee!” she replied, with a wild gush of tears; but after a moment’s pause adding, in a milder tone, “but yes, yes, I will believe it; I must believe it, or madden too!—Only begone now, for if this knight should come—not for a thousand worlds would I have it known to him that—that I am Lucrezia Borgia!”

Thus far had the Hospitaller listened with a fluctuation of anxiety, doubt, joy, and ultimate triumph to this involuntary and irresistible evidence of Lucre-

zia's innocence on one tremendous point—and so absorbedly that he scarcely breathed ;—but suddenly the whole bright fabric which had already risen from the ruins of this accusation was dashed to pieces.

“Art thou not more fearful that father Saturn may hear of it, Lucretia nostra ?” Cæsar replied, with a withering, livid smile, of which only himself and the fiend he served seemed capable. “Ancient fable—and modern history—show us that in his jealousies or fears for the supremacy he hath not paused to devour his own flesh ! Remember Francesco's doom, whom you loved so well !—and do not bid *me* tremble—but for thy minion, tremble thou !”

“Oh, thou—what can I call thee ! What if I told thy sire—but how could I accuse thee ? The devils themselves know no names for thy crimes !” said Lucrezia, gaspingly.

“Accuse me to him !—doubtless thou canst wield the thunder as thou wilt !—the cestus of thine unimaginable beauty has given thee sovereignty over our earthy Jove !” replied Cæsar, with exceeding fierceness. “Let him cast another son into the gory grave of him who—died so suddenly in the—who knows where !—dost thou ? Or of him—thy husband—who, when the assassins failed on the steps of St. Peter—was cured of all his suspicions and jealousies under the paternal roof, in the Vatican !”

“I will not call thee any monster—I know none that thou art !” said Lucrezia, resuming a singular calmness. “But hearken to me, at least, in this matter :—dost thou hear me, Cæsar, Duke of Romagna ?—I dared not tell my own heart—no, nor

the heavens themselves—I dared not believe—why I thought that in these horrors thou wert not so ignorant as the merciless steel that wrought them! But,—listen to me!—if but one hair of my noble deliverer’s head be harmed—rest thou assured that I will live only to avenge it—and that I shall be at no loss to tell what hand hath struck the blow, though it be by the murkiest midnight that ever covered thy most damned enterprise!”

“I know thy vengeance—but, *Lucretia nostra*! I shall not perish so dove-like as my predecessors—I am no dumb fish, to die without a shriek, with a gasp!” said Cæsar, fiercely, and yet with a mixture of sarcastic levity. “Ere I make my shamble from the scene I will confess—not only mine own offences, but all that Italy imputes to your grace! Of a surety, posterity will deem me a likely witness—and humanity cannot doubt it when they hear that Death stood by, the scrivener of my harangue! Thou knowest not what I am!—but this I will do, if thy vengeance—as thou callest thy woman’s pecking—force me to it.”

“They will call thee a madman—as thou art—humanity cannot believe it!” replied Lucrezia, in a thunderstruck and wavering manner, as if her own mind were reeling under too mighty a weight of anguish. “Nay, perchance, with the springs of thy direful existence would be exhausted those of mine ignominy! And he who first gave the sound forth might perish with its last echo on his lips!—Humanity cannot believe it.”

“No?—and how, I pray thee, did this towering

iceberg thou woorest look,—when your sire honoured us all by kissing you to our faces?” said the merciless Borgia, skilled in the finest nerves of mental agony.

“He looked—as I would have had him look, believing thy measureless lies!—for yes, yes, they are thine! Never till that hour—when thou didst reveal thyself to be the fiend—had calumny herself breathed evil word of me!” said Lucrezia, distractedly; but perhaps struck with a dark change in Cæsar’s countenance, she continued almost imploringly—“But, no,—perchance I am harsh now—it is my evil fate alone!—yet let me not drag more victims into its whirl. What shall I do then? Hate my father—refuse him the only love which yet remains to comfort his lonely age!—The only pure light beaming peace on the troubled tempests of his conscience, himself hath told me! Liars of the earth, lie on!—it shall not be! And let whoso believes these things against me on no other proof than invented murmurs—a licentious poet’s written vipers—a base populace’s belief—a daughter’s love for a most loving and lavishly indulgent father!—let him be judged and condemned by the like! He hath recognized the tribunal!”

“Thou hast uttered a malediction on thy tall Hospitaller—whereto most clerkly, sweet abbot, I chaunt—Amen!” replied Cæsar, with a ludicrous imitation of the careless nasal tone in which such functionaries often deliver their responses. “No doubt, since thy fearful, gentle sex delight only in sinewy ferocities, thou deemest him a very lion of

courage—dost applaud him in thy tender soul for the only man-slayer! doth it not? Ha, ha, but he dares not venture into Lucrezia's den!”

An involuntary movement of the concealed knight at this imputation on his courage, stirred one of the laurels against which he pressed in his eagerness; but excited no attention beyond a single instant's pause in the dialogue.

“He dares—but he will not!—thou canst not cheat me of this comfort at least;—he despises all women, not me alone!” returned Lucrezia, vehemently.

“But I will cheat thee of that comfort, thou fair wretch!—and disprove thy lies, black duke!” muttered Alfonso, in the depths of his soul.

“He will not come, I tell thee—he hath other sheep to mind!” returned Cæsar, with triumphant bitterness. “I had him too well watched not to know that a certain Morgan le Fay—whom doubtless you also beheld, blazing it—and whose acquaintance I too can boast—has invited him to sup with her to-night.”

“If this be true—why then—what is it to me?—O, Holy Mary! how often hast thou moved me to thy sweet dedication; and this perchance is but a harsher call!” exclaimed Lucrezia, with such passionate grief that Alfonso was at once touched with pity, indignant at Cæsar's falsehood, and at the same time struck by the coincidence with a dim thought that perhaps Lucrezia had some reason in declaring that she was calumniated—and by his agency.

“What!—our youthful widow, scarcely in her

twentieth spring—Lucrezia Borgia—a nun!” said Cæsar, with a contemptuous laugh. “They ornament death with flowers—but of the colder sort—lilies and violets and dank wall-flowers. But if it be true ye are scandalled, wherefore do ye confirm loose talk by this Roman marriage, when one in distant Ferrara would choke the very life-breath of calumny?”

“The Prince of Ferrara disdains to mingle the unstained honours of his ancestry with the shame of that pollution thou callest thy sister, Cæsar!” retorted the lady, as if rejoicing to be able to make her reply so stinging, though she herself shared the venom.

“For which some day I will cut his throat, and make him prince of all the carrion-flies that can find him on a dunghill!” said Cæsar, with extreme fierceness. “But thou pratest, our Lucrezia!—or if thou wert sincere it were easy enough for thee—since thou seest he will not love—to knit policies with this man of Ferrara, and persuade him to renew the chatter about weddings with the proud wittol his lord;—for all men have a handle, if not in one vice, in another—and his may be ambition.”

Lucrezia was silent, and Alfonso bitterly concluded that she was ruminating on the feasibility of such a project; and almost frenzied with wrath and indignation, he might perhaps have made some violent outbreak, if the hopes of a sweeter and subtler vengeance had not restrained him.

Very cautiously at first, he imitated with his hands the sound of remote footsteps, and he had the satis-

faction to hear Lucrezia exclaim—"He comes, he comes! I swear to thee, Cæsar, I did but intend to play him a merry rebuke for his scorn of me, which thyself may witness! But if he comes and finds thee here—something desperate I must needs do!"

Cæsar laughed scornfully. "He will not come," he said, "the sage will not—the coward dares not! Moreover, if 'tis he, and I pass him in this thwart light, he will as plainly discern me as the sun in an eclipse."

"It needs not," said Lucrezia, beseechingly. "Retire into yonder archway of ivy—thou shalt hear all that passes;—but I had promised he should see me without a mask—and I meant to keep the word to its sound by wearing only that of darkness so long as to fulfil my pledge—and this lamp hath a mystery in it invented by a rare artist of Florence."

"Ha, ha!—didst thou in very truth? He will not come—thy muffled she-Mercury will tell thee how vainly she besought him—but I will witness this trick of thine for a *divertissement*;" and still laughing gloomily, the duke strode to the archway indicated by Lucrezia, which was at some distance from the fountain, in the rocks, and raising the tapestry of ivy which almost concealed it, he retired within.

Alfonso stirred the laurels among which he was ensconced, and Lucrezia, satisfied that some one was approaching, touched an unseen spring, and suddenly the Cupids around the artificial moon, expanding their wings by a marvellously ingenious machinery, closed up every ray of light, and the grotto of Egeria

was in complete darkness. The Hospitaller seized his opportunity, glided out of his concealment, and easily reached the ground. He hesitated slightly, fearing lest she should observe that he did not make his entry at the portal ; but as if ascribing the pause to apprehension of some treachery in the arrivant, the ballerina began warbling like a nightingale luring its mate, and full as tremulously—

“Come, love !—I’ll teach thee
How ’tis to love ;—
And fear not ’twill harm thee,—
I learned from a dove.”

CHAPTER IX.

“Love is a species of melancholy, and a necessary part of this my treatise, which I may not omit; *operi suscepto inserviendum fuit*; so Jacobus Mysillus pleadeth for himself in his translation of Lucian’s dialogues, and so do I; I must and will perform my task.”—*Anatomie of Melancholy*.

ALFONSO could no longer doubt that Lucrezia had been betrayed by her emissary to the duke, and that consequently the solitude, the adornment, the tears, the passionate pantomime he had witnessed—were all for him! These were perilous recollections to bear with him in the part which he had resolved to play, more especially as he concluded Lucrezia’s assurances that she was surrounded by an unseen court, were only inventions to cajole or intimidate her unwelcome visitant.

Guided by the warm moonlight at the entrance of the grotto, Alfonso groped his way to it; then turned, and seemed as if entering from the exterior, though somewhat suddenly. He was continuing his advance with a firm step towards the fountain, which slightly gleamed even in the darkness, when the ballerina ceased her lure. “Sir cavalier,” she said, in her clear,

flute-like tones, "methinks you are now as near as reverent worshippers are wont to approach to my waves, though, as one of Dian's knights, the vestal nymphs of these caves bid you very welcome."

"Methinks the vestal nymphs must long since have departed, since here Lucrezia Borgia is worshipped as of old the Queen of Paphos!" said the knight, irresolutely pausing.

"What doth a Knight of holy John then in such a bower?" replied the ballerina. "But, remember, Knight of St. John, I have kept mine oath, for I speak to thee now unmasked."

"Unmasked!—when darkness hides you as effectually as a mountain from my gaze," returned Alfonso, with an agitation which almost betrayed itself in his wavering voice.

"I have kept my faith to the letter—what more ask you of a woman, and an attendant on Lucrezia Borgia?" said the ballerina, with forced vivacity. "But I heard thou wert affrighted—didst not dare to come—lest the Sicilian dancer should prove to be the fiend like her who tempted Cyprian? And these fears redouble in darkness; we will have light."

And almost simultaneously the Cupids withdrew their wings, and the light streamed over the scene, revealing the nymph of Egeria seated on the brink of her fountain, once more masked.

"I deceived thy messenger—no ill precaution, lest ill should be plotted," returned the Hospitaller, collecting all his firmness, and hurrying to make the offence he meditated irreparable at once. "I feared

thee not, since I suspected—and thy deception now adds proof—that thou wert a viler thing than Cyprian's devil—a licentious woman! Or, to say the worst at once, Lucrezia Borgia herself!—and yet I am here. But hearken to what purpose, and if thou art that spot on all her sex, on all humanity, and for ever!—something it may kindle thee to shame and repentance that have so falsified nature's brightest mintage, matching so precious an outward show with baseness so intrinsic! Something it may serve to convince thee that there are breasts in which—that thy licentious love can kindle no answering flame in any but hearts as sulphuric with foul passions! I am here but to receive confirmation of thine infamy by gazing at it with mine own eyes. I am in Rome itself, only to obtain such evidence, to justify Alfonso of Ferrara in his refusal to mingle the purple of his royal blood with so contaminate a stream!”

Alfonso thought he distinguished an irrepressible exclamation of triumph from the ivy archway; but Lucrezia made no reply, gazing from her mask as if turned to stone. There was a pause of utter silence, lasting several moments.

“Knight,—but you rave! You dared not utter sounds like these to the Lucrezia of whom you speak, and who I am not, I swear to you by all the saints above the golden stars!” she replied at length with bewildered vehemence. “And for the ducal churl, thy sender, return and tell him—nay, tarry but a short time longer in Rome, and thou shalt return to rid him of all fear by bearing the tidings of Lucrezia's marriage with the heir of the Orsini.”

This was a form of vengeance and pride on which Alfonso had not calculated, so womanly it was ; and she spoke the words with a passionate fierceness which showed that the Borgian fire glowed even in her rosy blood.

“Nay, then, if thou art not Lucrezia, let me behold thy face even as thou didst swear to me,” he returned, much more mildly. “Oh, could I think indeed that there was another woman in the world so like—and so unlike her, as I would find thee!—an innocent Lucrezia!—but none but Lucrezia melts language into music—none but Lucrezia breathes encircled with the air of paradise !”

“It is then true that—you hate not all womankind, but only Lucrezia Borgia?” returned the ballerina, in a mollified and even not ungratified tone.

“Wert thou any other, I would answer by loving thee more than all womankind hath been or shall be loved by man when the last day sums up all time!” returned Alfonso, somewhat too warmly, certes, for his part.

“Were I Lucrezia—the terrible, death-dealing Lucrezia Borgia of whom thou speakest—dost thou think I would listen to thee thus—I will not belie my thought—delightedly,” replied the ballerina, playfully, and yet with a deep sigh. “Rail on against her ; ’tis nought to me—or rather, it is pleasant, being my rival, it seems, in your saintly liking—were she any other than herself. Ah, indeed, but it crowns my glory in having obtained so virtuous a society in this place, to know that my unseen beauties have won the victory over charms which—I have heard men

praise, perchance, that lacked judgment. I pray you, knight, give my vanity the triumph to know when and where that proud lady has wooed you so closely that you are driven so desperately on your defences? Our Lady witness! though one of a gossiping company, I had not heard that Madama Lucrezia was reduced to such straits."

Again the Hospitaller was foiled, for he felt that, without displaying a coxcombry alien to his nature, he could not allege any proof in support of his insinuations, since the ballerina persisted in denying her identity. But his subtle intellect, rapid in combinations, suggested a master-stroke.

"Thy question would have remained unasked, if thou hadst heard her speeches to me in this day's carnival, disguised as Fata Morgana," he replied. "The sprightliest wooer of our sex—Ovid himself—might have learned something from her."

"Nay, now, indeed thou beliest her, knight!—some witchcraft has deceived thee," said the ballerina, hurriedly.

"And so did I hope—misdoubt—when I beheld thee playing thy sorceries as the ballerina, and dreamed thou wert Lucrezia!" replied the Hospitaller. "But since thou art *not* Lucrezia, the lascivious Fairy Queen, no doubt, was the lady who bears that much wronged name."

"Nay, knight, I will be just even to my rival!—I have told you I am an attendant on Donna Lucrezia, and I declare to you that Morgan le Fay was enacted by her this day, even as much as by me!—and thou

mayst remember her procession passed while we were at parle at the Capitol," said the ballerina.

"Nay, then, if thou art of her so nigh attendance, and dislikest me not—thou art the very sphinx to unravel me my riddles," returned the Hospitaller.

"But, holy knight! is it religious to win vassals to traduce their lords?" said the ballerina, with an audible falter of the voice.

"And so thou dost acknowledge that to speak the truth of Lucrezia is to speak evil?" retorted the knight.

"Go on, go on; speak plainly, and I will answer so—but indeed you trap me with these indirections," said the ballerina. "I am a woman—thou art half a priest—both fond of scandal, some have it; therefore ask what thou wilt, and to the compass of my knowledge I will answer with the truth."

"'Tis well minded;—you are a woman—therefore swear by some oath, if there be any which women keep, that at least thou wilt not betray the trust I repose in you!" said the Hospitaller.

"Trust me not, trust me not—if thou hast aught to say which the most dreadful of the Borgias may not hear!" exclaimed the ballerina, with an intensity of alarm which Alfonso saw, but feigned not to observe.

"How else I know not any means to accomplish my errand," he said, with a strong effort to hinder his voice from faltering. "Proofs—proofs of her guilt!"

"What need of proofs when the world is judging a woman?" replied the ballerina, with a bitterness

foreign to her usual tones. "Speak on; what am I to answer?—for indeed you have me on the rack!"

"Lady, then—placed as you are so near Lucrezia's person—you must be able to tell me whether she is innocent or guilty?" replied Alfonso, with some scarcely observable hesitation.

"Innocent or guilty!—of what?—I tell you again, sir knight, I am no sphinx, therefore deal not with me in enigmas!" she exclaimed, breathing short as if with strong emotion.

"Nay, I will indeed remember that you are a woman;—I may not speak more plainly.—But, lady, you cannot be ignorant of what whispers, universal as the wind, discourse concerning the hideous beauty your mistress!" said Alfonso, not without a pang of remorse. "But yet—understand me when I say it—that if your service is of three years' standing with Donna Lucrezia—can you give me no inkling of *where* the Duke of Gandia was slain, by whose hand, and for what cause!"

"I would give my dearest heart's blood—I mean, my lady hath often said so—but she is a devil, we know,—to learn!" replied the ballerina.

"But can it be that neither you nor any of that too beautiful lady's attendance had any suspicions?" said Alfonso.

"Yours should teach us how baseless such may be!" replied the lady, with a stifled sigh, but carefully noted by her inquisitor.

"And therefore do I seek certainties.—Remember you, lady, of the night when the young duke perished?" pursued he.

“Oh, in very truth, I forget it not ! But you are discoursing dangerous matters in this air !” said the ballerina, with a fugitive glance at the ivy archway.

“Nay, damsel, I trust we need not fear to be overheard by Francesco’s murderers in this haunt of his kinsfolk,” he continued. “You remember him, then ? He was a fair youth, if men report the truth.”

“Oh, holy Mother of mercy !—Francesco !” was all the ballerina could reply, choked by the bitterness of the recollections which arose in her heart.

“And loved to glass his goodly form in women’s eyes—wherefore I may apprehend a reason for that passion which holds you. Your beauty, lady, moves me to think that perchance the blooming and amorous cavalier was wont to address some portion of his vows to you ?”

“As a most dear brother I loved him—as a faithful friend—as one whose bright and generous spirit—whose courage and love—but he is gone ! To pray hourly for the justice due on his unknown murderers is all that even his fond father and loved sister can now perform.”

“Loved !—ay, perchance *too well* ?” said the knight ; and although the drift of his questioning could scarcely have escaped her perception, the lady started as if she had till then forgotten it in those tragical recollections. The sagacious inquirer noted this to her advantage, that it seemed like a shock to the current of her ideas, and therefore by possibility flowed not from the common source which guilt would offer.

“Too well !—all that I have heard of their affec-

tion I will tell you," she said, after a pause. "They were so like in person that, but for the difference of sex and some few years, never was resemblance closer; and in their natures (deem what thou wilt of it!) there was that sweet and musical concord which in two instruments is harmony—in souls love as spiritual and as pure! And if the fierce and intractable temper of a brother strengthened this alliance of love into one also of policy—and his envious carpings have been thus blackly interpreted—Heaven grant it was not his intent as well as deed!"

"Soh!—fair one, thou shouldst have worn a lawyer's gown to make the science musical!" said the Hospitaller. "But since you remember that direful night—were you with Lucrezia on it?"

"I was, and we were in the convent of the blessed sisters of Santa Maria Trastevere!" replied the ballerina, with a convulsive shudder.

"How chanced it she was there on a night in which the solemn feast was given to celebrate the departure of the cardinal—now Duke of Romagna—her brother, to present the crown of Naples to Don Federigo?" said the knight, not without a deep satisfaction mingling with his hopelessness of a satisfactory solution, at the discomfiture of the listener.

"Lucrezia and the cardinal had—had quarrelled on a matter which, if I remember rightly—nay, it was a foolish quarrel—a word—a nothing!" she exclaimed, starting at a slight stir in the ivy.

Foiled by this circumstance, still Alfonso was

not displeased to remark the emotion of the unseen auditor.

“Concluding, then, that Francesco perished by the hand of some secret rival—who might it be that, under the roof of the Vatican itself, strangled the Prince of Salerno in his bed?” said Alfonso, with mingled severity and gloom.

“It is false, most false!—who is it says this horror is true?” said the ballerina, wildly. “The Prince of Salerno perished of the wounds he received in the square of St. Peter, from enemies whom his own rashness and arrogance had provoked.”

“The story sounded not so in Ferrara—it was there averred that he was recovering so fast of his wounds that the time was almost gone to pretend with any decency that he died of them, though humanity is of a marvellous chemistry,” replied the knight. “We heard, too, of a strange scene which preceded his destruction—when she debarred him her very presence—when he forced his way to it by violence—and she fled to her father, and for hours refused even to look at her husband, clinging to the pontiff, and hiding her face in his robes, while he, forsooth, preached duty and a wife’s submission!—And won her at length to consent to a return to it within a month; but meanwhile death spread his snares in secret, and caught the unhappy youth exulting in his fool’s paradise of hope, on the very day of the promised fulfilment, on the steps of the pontifical palace—if thou wilt!”

“Oh, but you know not all—indeed you know

not all !” returned the ballerina, desperately. “She married him against her will—moved only by the supplications of that father!—bethink you! the vicar of Heaven, a father, supplicating—wherefore so earnest, then—Lucrezia but slightly misdoubted. I know not why—it might be because she loved not the effeminate Lord of Pesaro—yet I know not wherefore the ferocious boy of Salerno was chosen, whose brutish excesses of—love, thou wilt call it, being a man—whose sensual madness—once suffered, infused such indignation, loathing, terror, that—but whatever was done, was prompted and sanctioned by a man whose holiness makes all his utterances oracles of Heaven !”

“Fra Bruno!” returned the Hospitaller with a start. “He also who procured the divorce of the Lord of Pesaro?”

“The Lord of Pesaro—was divorced by a decree of the church!” said the ballerina, covering her mask with her hands, and speaking in a low, panting, shamestruck tone, as if nearly exhausted by the length and severity of the scrutiny, and yet unwilling to abandon any hope of dissipating the evil impressions of the scrutinizer. “Nay, more!—I will avow a secret which shall put me as much in thy power, as thy questionings do thee in mine! A secret of Lucrezia Borgia’s!—thou hast heard what Fra Bruno said of this Ursine marriage? But thou knowest not that he hath infused scruples into Lucrezia relating to the lawfulness of the dissolution of her first betrothal, albeit to one whom she never saw! And

that therefore any subsequent marriage were but disguised adultery !”

“Tut, tut, lady, you jest with me !—The daughter of the supreme head of the church entertain doubts of his power to dissolve all contracts, earthly—ay, even heavenly ?” returned the knight. “And who can believe that such a phantasy divorced Pesaro, when it prevented not the marriage with him whom thou hast called a ‘ferocious boy ?’”

“Heaven forgive me, since he is gone !” said the ballerina, melting into tears. “I said not so—but, knight, thou knowest not—nay, who can tell the motives of that change ?—What if in the absence of that powerful spirit on which she leaned,—impelled by irresistible circumstances,—ay, even by a womanly passion for that fair fame which you hold to be extinct in her breast—but what avail words ?—Deem, if thou wilt, that she married the violent prince to murder him—since murder is her habitual and favourite pastime !”

“Lady, if we acquit her—more darkly fall our suspicions on the unknown rival who sometimes uses the keys of St. Peter—at others the dagger of the assassin—to set her free—or rather to clutch her away from the arms to which he had unwillingly resigned her, to deceive the world’s suspicion or cajole it into doubt !”

“And this unknown !—you speak as if he were not unknown to you !—Knight, if you be a man, speak out and fairly, for indeed these fiendish hints torture me nigh to madness !” exclaimed the balle-

rina, starting up with frenzied impatience, but almost instantly resuming her seat as if in exhaustion, and faintly adding, "I pray you, in mercy, tell me who this unknown may be, in your suspicions?"

"Nay, lady—bid me not answer by aught but silence!—yet perchance the spectre that must needs haunt Salerno's chambers in the Vatican, could reply!" said the unrelenting Hospitaller.

"Wilt thou interrogate it, then, and thou shalt have lodging in them?" replied the ballerina, with a wild laugh. "Lucrezia at least fears not whatever it may reveal!"

"Let me do the phantom's office, then!—why, who is it that is so bent on wedding Lucrezia to the heir of the Orsini—that she may be fixed in Rome—against every maxim of policy?" replied Alfonso, giving way to the bitterness which possessed his soul.

"Truly!—I know not that: so powerful a race only can balance—I know not what I say!" exclaimed the ballerina, in a voice whose despair went to the heart of Alfonso. "Blessed Virgin!—truly art thou Lucrezia's only refuge, since even this renewed sacrifice avails only to strengthen the dire phantasy it would destroy!—thou cruel man of Ferrara! thine own dark errand hither might have better instructed thee—for if Lucrezia must remain in Rome, Lucrezia had not been offered to Ferrara!—and Ferrara need not basely have sought the means to traduce her in it!—Nay, I will keep your counsel; fear not. Only those who love Lucrezia, need fear!—and I blame you not for your hatred of her, believing thus, for methinks I should abhor the very sun that shone on such a

wretch! Return to your harsh land, and win what reward you may by telling your master that one who should know best—one who has known Lucrezia since she knew herself—admitted all the worst that you could say against her, as truths which only angels from heaven can disprove!”

Much but secretly affected at the blank desperation of this avowal, Alfonso made a few irresolute movements, but no reply, until he was nigh vanquished by observing how fast tears rained from her eyes into the fountain, over which she bent to conceal the agony of her grief.

“It is enough—this confession suffices!” he said, approaching, though with hesitation, and raising her hand to his lips. “But for yourself, lady, your generous advocacy even of so evil a cause persuades me that you are worthy of a true friendship!”

She drew the hand from him instantly, and with a kind of delirious gaiety wrote the word “FRIENDSHIP” rapidly on the waters of the fountain.

“Look!—scarcely a ripple remains! That is the end!” she said, laughing with wonderful bitterness. “Let us add but another word—farewell!—and let the trace it shall leave tell when we shall meet again!”

Something the Hospitaller meant to say, but the words died on his lips; but seating himself beside her on the fountain margin, he gazed with mingled sadness and passion on the lovely form of the ballerina, heaving with the emotion which she endeavoured to conceal.

“We will not part thus—enemies!” he said at length with increasing emotion, and scarcely know-

ing what he did say. "Those lips whose roses are blossoming fire—to make my nature divine too—nay!—let me but behold thy face, or prove, prove that thou art *not* Lucrezia, and I will worship thee!"

"Yes, I will prove it, assuredly I will prove it; but touch not my mask, as thou art a knight and a man!" exclaimed the ballerina, starting up in terror as Alfonso, finding his resolutions reel, seized the mask with the intention of leaving himself by the revelation without resource or hope. But at the instant that he drew it off, the light again disappeared at the touch of the invisible spring—and simultaneously the Hospitaller felt his neck encircled as if by the arms of some air-incumbent form, and lips whose velvety sweetness seemed to combine all essences of deliciousness, were pressed breathlessly and glowingly to his own, but for an evanescent instant of sensation, while a voice whispered on them in ripples of music, "Would Lucrezia have so forgiven thee?" Yielding irresistibly to the delirium of his delight, the Hospitaller stretched his arms to clutch the beauteous phantom—but he grasped only empty air!

He rushed forward, and, at the same instant, there arose a wild uproar and tumult all around; the moon of the fountain burst into a blaze of whirling light which illumined the whole grotto; a shrill, agitated bell was audible, as if from the depths of the fountain; and suddenly the verdant precincts were crowded with a most extraordinary company, shouting, hooting, laughing, yelling, and waving torches around. Satyrs, nymphs, fauns, and all the varieties of sylvan

deities poured out of every nook and cranny by which there was entrance—all shrieking execrations on the profaner of the sacred solitude, and brandishing various weapons appropriate to their qualities. The satyrs wielded their crooked staves, the fauns their stiff pine-wreaths, the nymphs their branches of oak, and all menacingly and with hideous clamour. But by far the most formidable personages of the group were a number of shepherds, with huge boar spears, who made their appearance on every side.

“Pan, Pan!” shouted a hundred voices. “Come and judge the mortal who has dared to profane thy solitudes! Echo, where is Pan?”

Distant, faint, and melodious voices repeated in every direction, “Pan! where is Pan?”

At first Alfonso stood as if rooted to the ground, almost believing himself surrounded by the rural gods in reality, or under the illusion of some strange sorcery. But suddenly the conviction rushed upon him that he was betrayed either to be made the jest of a company of carnival revellers, or perhaps to the vengeance of Lucrezia and her myrmidons for the affronts which he had put upon her. While gazing round in amazement to find himself so completely circled, and hesitating whether to attempt a forcible escape, the shrill shriek of pipes was heard, and attended by a riotous company of satyrs, Pan hobbled into the grotto on his goats’ legs, the satyrs playing a wild march with their oaten reeds.

“Silence!—and where is the guilty nymph who has lured the mortal hither?” shouted the sylvan god.

“Egeria, Egeria!” exclaimed unnumbered accusing voices.

“At thine old tricks again, luring wisdom whither it should least come,” said Pan, severely. “Yes, hide thyself in thy blushing waves!—But the mortal, where is he?”

“Fie, fie, fie!—a Knight of St. John, a Knight of St. John!” exclaimed all the nymphs at once. “Had it been old Silenus now, or one of the satyrs, we had not wondered.”

“The Holy Knight of St. John!” resounded on all sides, amidst a general and outrageous peal of laughter.

“In very truth, ye have the laughing side of the jest, but if ye will confront me with the nymph, I will prove that at least we ought to share the punishment!” said the Hospitaller, endeavouring to make the best of his ludicrous or dangerous position—he scarcely knew which, or whether both.

“And then it will be a pleasure!—No, no, no; bring him along, and our queen shall judge him!” exclaimed the nymphs, and Alfonso beheld himself rapidly hemmed in by the shepherds with their spears.

His doubts seemed now to call for some imperative decision; but while he remembered almost in a mass the dismal legends of Lucrezia’s haunts, his lips still tingled with the honied fire left on them from hers, and it seemed impossible that she could really mean him harm! And yet he stood hesitating, when suddenly a laughing voice saluted him, and the Duke of Romagna made his entry, as if from the valley with-

out, with his vizard in his hand, and a smiling look of welcome.

“Fear nothing, good knight,” he said, “your sentence shall not be too severe!—and suffer these rural folk to lead you before their empress, Donna Lucrezia, who, with me, has devised this carnival jest. Your forfeit shall be light, if you can detect and pacify her damsel who performed the part of Egeria, and who has already rejoined her mistress, unmasked.”

The secret feelings with which Alfonso listened to this beguiling and perfidious statement may be imagined; but not deserted by his own skill in the conjuncture, he replied in a tone of similar hilarity, “Lead on, since your highness guarantees my safety from the fate of Orpheus! And if I find the damsel, before you all she shall acknowledge that I accepted her invitation only to read her a sermon which she will not soon forget.”

CHAPTER X.

"In all my strict inquiries, all the humours
Which I have drain'd with more than chymist's pains,
I have not found a temper so complete
To furnish forth a greatness as my Cæsar's."

LEE.

MARCHING like a prisoner of war, surrounded by his shepherd spearmen, Alfonso affected to enter into the spirit of the jest, and suffered himself to be quietly shackled by Pan with ivy, which an effort would snap. The moment he stepped forth in this array from the grotto, the road was beset by a multitude of the most extraordinary phantoms, pelting him with comfits; the woods around teemed with the wildest forms of Grecian mythology; statues took life; every tree yielded its sleeping dryad; far melodies sounded in every direction; naiads arose in the stream, and laughingly threw their waters in showers at him; with a cheerful hunting blast Diana and her nymphs appeared on a rock, and darted at him blunt arrows with gilded heads; through all which they arrived at an avenue of lofty elms, whose overarching branches, filagreed by the moonlight,

resembled the interior of a Gothic cathedral, and formed a natural hall fit for the audience of the rural deities. Beneath these, again, were bosquets of orange trees in full blossom, which diffused an inexpressibly sweet perfume in the air, and cooled the gaze as if their verdure was strewn with snow. The vista terminated in an open semicircular saloon on a somewhat raised terrace of blue marble, richly gilded, and decorated with frescoes; in the midst of which was a verdant throne. The moon shone fully upon it, with a light like that of a rayless sun, and by the lustre Alfonso discerned that the terrace was thronged with a splendid court, assembled round a lady who occupied the throne, among which the scarlet robes of cardinals, and the continual flashing of jewels, announced personages of high rank.

As the prisoner approached, environed by his grotesque capturers, laughter as inextinguishable as that which shook the gods on a somewhat similar occasion, resounded among the occupants of the terrace. Continuing his enforced advance, Alfonso discerned with amazement that in the brief time which had elapsed, Lucrezia had totally changed her attire, and was now arrayed in a Spanish dress, suitable to her rank, and in the fashion of the time. A boddice of silver tissue confined her perfect shape, with every heave of which sparkled unnumbered jewels; and a diadem which shone as if with stars, so bright and large were the diamonds in it, flashed on her brow. She looked a queen, resembling only in the vague identity of all forms of beauty, either the vivacious dancer of the Capitol, or the voluptuous

nymph of the fountain ; and but for the paleness of her complexion, it was impossible to guess that she had passed through scenes so exhausting—feelings so passionate—either by her manner or expression, which was proud and stedfastly tranquil.

Alfonso's suspicions were deepened by this wonderful facility of change, which seemed to demonstrate in her faculties of dissimulation much exercised ; but expecting the raillery which the supposed relaxation of his principles would occasion, he was troubled to observe among the laughing groups nearly all those who had witnessed his grand display of them in refusing Lucrezia's scarf—the Orsino, Le Beaufort, Bembo, and a multitude of others.

The gloom on the Orsino's visage, however, marked but little delight in the frolic, and formed a contrast to Sir Reginald, whose bold, handsome countenance was all alit with mirth and satisfaction. Bembo seemed not to know how to look, but to intend to take his cue from the aspect of his lord ; and accordingly he grew solemn and sedate when he perceived Alfonso's stern composure. Indeed the manner became more general, when the courtiers observed that Lucrezia's paleness deepened—her lips trembled—and that when the criminal was placed before her, and Pan recited his accusation, complaining of an attempt to misuse his innocent solitudes, and to misguide one of his chastest nymphs,—instead of the laughing raillery of which she was mistress, and with which all expected she would overwhelm the religious knight who had refused to be her champion—she was

silent, and kept her eyes sunk with an expression of shame, and even of an undefined fearfulness.

“Knight! answer, or thou art lost!” exclaimed Cæsar, affecting to clap the Hospitaller encouragingly on the shoulder.

“These charges are too general, signor. Let Pan, if he hath any witnesses of what passed, allege particulars; and, by his crooked staff! those shall acquit me without any other reply,” said Alfonso, in the bitterness of his feelings projecting a stroke which should deal two ways at once. “Thereby shall ye truly discern that I accepted the nymph’s invitation—more effectually to convince her that I despised it, taking no advantage either of the solitude or of her unconcealed tenderness, but to read her a more dismal lecture than, I misdoubt, some father confessors would! And when Echo betrayed us to Pan, I grieve to think that it was envy which prompted her to repeat a sound so delicate that the neighbouring nightingales, albeit on the listen, heard it not—when, mark ye all! without any encouragement, wish, or return from me, she pressed her lips,—which yet I own, if they had not touched like flame, from some cedary sweetness in them, would not have troubled me so much!—to mine, in that form which hath for several ages been known to immortals and men by the style and title of a—kiss! So that, indeed, I have cause to bless Echo, that brought Pan and light to my assistance, or I know not what might have befallen me in the power of a nymph so enterprising!”

General murmurs of applause, mingled with laughter, accompanied this extraordinary defence, during which Lucrezia's countenance flushed so deeply that it was in itself sufficient to betray her to all who had any inklings of the truth; but Cæsar's visage, for an instant, took all the pallid tints which deserted hers, ere it recovered its own.

"This is, indeed, a fearful charge to be brought against a nymph that belongs not to the court of Paphos," he said. "Dearest Lucrezia! let her be called, and publicly repel this boasting companion's accusal."

"Not so, not so—since he hath so thanklessly betrayed her to our laughter—it were to shame both," replied the lady, hastily, without lifting her long eyelashes, and colouring back into paleness like a cloud receding into whiteness as it passes from the sunset. "Not that I believe it altogether for a verity—but we will not labour to prove what, being known, were so little to any satisfaction but that of this chevalier's vanity—which perchance she but intended to make overflow, as we have seen it. Knight, knight, it is not well of thee—if such occurred—to betray this folly, but it is warning to trust thee with none of more blushing avowal. Leaving the rest in surmise, we will only pronounce on thee this punishment, that if thou canst not detect among my retinue, unmasked, her who cajoled you, masked,—your ignorance shall be perpetual."

Alfonso bowed with an air of indifference which he could perceive struck a pang into the lady's heart; but without relenting he stepped aside.

“And now, my Lord Orsino, having adjudged this knotty cause, we are in the humour to listen to your music,” she continued, turning to Paolo with a kindness which obviously brightened his expression ; and starting up as it were into existence on the word, he left the terrace, and in a few moments appeared beneath it with a retinue of chosen musicians. They commenced immediately in a fine strain of harmony, whose effect beneath the hushed and resplendent skies was inexpressibly delicious. The dreams of Elysium seemed to be realized, and that these were the happy fields in whose atmosphere the delighted spirit was consoled for every woe ; and with all his wrath, Alfonso’s heart melted in his bosom when he gazed on Lucrezia, and remarked the languor and dejection in her face, and the tears, scarcely repressed, which lurked beneath her eyelids. But the Orsino, who had a rich and tuneable voice, disturbed the reverie by a song which he sang in pathetic lamentation over the cruelty of his mistress, all the musicians answering him in set responses like an ancient chorus.

At the conclusion of the lay, the ladies on the terrace showered nosegays, worn hitherto in their bosoms, among the serenaders, and the young nobles around them, which they eagerly caught or raised and set in their breasts ; all save the Knight of St. John, who made no effort to secure any.

When the laughing scramble was over, the serenaders crowded up the terrace ; and, as if starting from a dream, Lucrezia arose.

“How is this ? I have not thrown my nosegay !” she said, hurriedly. “And ye are all matched by the

chances of the sweet flowers. But the Knight of St. John has picked up none, and so it seems that fate would have us walk to our collation in the grotto together. Therefore, dearest ladies, and my lords, link hands as your flowery lucks direct; and we, as considering his renown we well may without scandal, will follow last with this faithful Knight of the Cross."

The youthful ladies immediately obeyed their mistress, by taking the arms of the cavaliers who had chanced upon their nosegays—an artifice which chained the discontented Orsino and Le Beaufort remote from their cynosure, but rendered it impossible for them without extreme discourtesy to avoid. A number of pages, beautiful as Cupids, lighted the way with torches which burned with a perfumed lustre, and the procession was set in motion towards the grotto. But the last couple had preceded for some instants ere Lucrezia, without raising her eyes, took the arm of the motionless but reverential knight.

They advanced for some steps in silence, and if Alfonso had previously doubted it, the musical motion of her form might have convinced him of her identity with the ballerina: the recollection of all that had passed between them—his bitter invectives against her—of the light in which he had represented himself—a feeling of tenderness and compassion which he could not vanquish, prolonged the silence. Lucrezia doubtless fathomed the thoughts which possessed him in part, for she bit her proud lip which curled with beauty and haughtiness, and yet smiled with a degree of timidity and wavering doubt as she broke it.

“We are alone, signor,” she said, “which I have purposely contrived—but start not! Whatever you may have heard of Lucrezia Borgia, you, at least, are in no danger from her cruelty—who saved her life at the hazard of your own! Fain would I, by any means, in some part requite the obligation; and chance has perchance offered me no ill one. Your friend, Messer Bembo, assures that you are of noble birth, and of no mean fortunes! The damsel who lured you hither is the heiress of great wealth, the only daughter of a most noble house. She has confessed to me—nay, your divulgement more than confesses it, that she dislikes you not! Signor, deem you—is it impossible that you should love?—For, procuring a dispensation from your vows from our holy father, what remains but that I make two happy, who am said to have made many miserable?”

Alfonso paused for a moment in utter astonishment, mingled, scarcely to his own consciousness, with chagrin; for he discerned in it an anxious attempt to destroy all suspicion in his mind of her identity with the ballerina, and so to conclude the adventure.

“Lady,” he replied, turning suddenly and almost starting at the deep earnestness with which Lucrezia was gazing in expectation of his reply. “Lady, I am deeply bound to you and to the fair dame who honours me so far; but my vow is of that power and efficacy which even the holy father of Christendom cannot absolve—being the determination of my own heart and will.”

“It must be,” replied Lucrezia, with a playful and yet melancholy smile—“It must be, signor, that

your heart is already pledged, and the memory of some one very beauteous makes all our Roman charms poor in your sight."

"It is not so, illustrious lady," replied Alfonso, with involuntary fervour. "For until I came to Rome, I never gazed on beauty that won from me more than the eye-homage which as fair a painting might have claimed."

"Why, then,—since you have never seen the lady's face, you say—said you not so? with whose hand I would enrich you, knight, will you not at least delay your stay until you have?" said Lucrezia. "For love comes more stealthily than light, of which even the dark cypresses are enamoured in our Italian noon-days—and how know you but that your hour may strike at last?"

"Bright lady, it is known that you are love's oracle!—and yet still let me deem my heart in little danger from any of your fairest satellites," replied Alfonso, with a strange mixture of asperity and warmth.

"Love's oracle!—then indeed am I inspired by an unknown god!" replied Lucrezia, colouring more beautifully than ever in the earnest look which Alfonso cast upon her, as she uttered the words so contradictory to her reported character. "But mistake me not, sir Hospitaller! I deny not the meaning of your glance, for I have sought love in all things, and under all forms!—And if I have found it not, even when most inspiring it—if I have listened to its richest eloquence as to some foreign language which my heart understood not—it is not that I have lacked

the soul for love ! Love I found not—but I deny not the accusation of your glance—its phantoms I have eagerly chased ; and since happiness cannot be mine, wherefore should I hesitate at least to quaff at the purple fountains of pleasure, and feast out the else unmeaning or troubled dream of life ?”

“ You need no other defence, lady, than that which was used of old—to display your beauty to your judges,” replied Alfonso, coldly.

“ As Phryne, the Athenian courtesan ! You example me nobly, signor,—but I blame you not,” she replied, with exceeding sadness and gentleness. “ What avails contending with destiny ?—And this is mine.”

“ If Lucrezia Borgia complains of fortune, who then has cause to praise her ?” he said, secretly touched with the plaintive submission of the reply.

“ A vintage feast overshadowed by a thunderstorm, who enjoys ?” returned Lucrezia with vivacity, but pausing suddenly.

“ I fear, lady, you have too severe a confessor, since futurity appears to you under so dark a simile,” said the knight, with an innuendo which he thought would not escape Lucrezia’s notice.

“ Futurity !—how can my confessor threaten me with that, when I obey all his injunctions to the letter—when—but no, I have indeed done wrong,” said Lucrezia, turning pale, and instantly adding, with a liveliness which, from the contrast, seemed forced,—“ But we are fallen in a mole’s pace ; and despite your sanctity, my Lord Orsino looks often back !—Signor, I will not take your denial until you have seen

all my fair court unveiled, (among whom will be the nymph of the Egerian fount,) and if your cold eye selects none, your silence shall be a sufficient answer."

She quickened her step as she spoke the word, and they soon approached the grotto, which was in complete darkness. Perhaps this was purposely ordained, for when they reached the entrance Lucrezia hastened some steps before the Hospitaller, made a signal to one of the attendants, and with a general start the company found themselves standing in a blaze of light from innumerable lamps, which seemed to kindle of their own accord. The sumptuous dresses of the dames and cavaliers blazed into view; the fountain leaped up to a great height and descended in showers of liquid jewels of lovely hues; and a collation of exquisite viands, fruit, sweetmeats, and wines, served in richly wrought plate, wooed the appetite on every hand. Sweet harmonies were audible in the neighbouring groves, and amidst a fanfare of trumpets, and a general buzz of delight and admiration, Lucrezia took her seat with Cæsar at the banquet.

The Orsino glared gloomily at Alfonso as he entered, and Le Beaufort, who better knew what was to be feared in that quarter, grew pale; and the smiles which Lucrezia profusely bestowed on the latter, and the silence and reserve of the Hospitaller, as he took his place as far as possible from the queen of the feast, but little lightened Paolo's uneasiness.

The flower of the beauty, wit, and magnificence of the pontifical court seemed culled to grace this festival, for none was present who was not remarkable for one of these attributes, and sometimes for a union

of all. The most beautiful women in Italy, whom the jubilee had assembled in Rome, and her own noble and lovely retinue, surrounded Lucrezia; and yet envy itself could not deny that she surpassed them all. Nevertheless, and perhaps for the first time, she misdoubted the supremacy of her own beauty; and while affecting to have her attention absorbed in other objects, her eye watched with devouring anxiety every glance of the Hospitaller's.

Alfonso, on his part, desirous to strengthen himself in his resolutions, by removing temptations from his path which he felt every instant growing more irresistible, and to misguide the hatred of the Duke of Romagna, affected to be instantly struck with the appearance of one of Lucrezia's ladies, who in stature and the colour of the hair somewhat resembled her. It seemed that he mistook her for the damsel of the grotto, laughingly challenging her acquaintance, which she as merrily denied, declaring herself to be the wife of one of the noblemen present; but Alfonso would not be convinced, and attached himself to her with a zeal which brought on both a continual play of raillery.

Lucrezia immediately observed this artifice, which she did not suspect to be one; but her terror of the Duke suggested a somewhat similar procedure: she affected to join her guests in their merriment, and, supported at once by pride, rivalry, and the unbounded admiration of her courtiers, which seemed to restore her confidence in her beauty, her gaiety dazzled even in that universal blaze. Among the banqueters were some of the most brightly imaginative, or profoundly

politic of the great geniuses who made the age illustrious ; and yet the brilliant play and coruscations of Lucrezia's wit, and the depth of some of those glittering remarks which fell from her lips, were not surpassed by any. There was, indeed, something of recklessness in the general effect—a tone of defiance and mockery,—the lightning's power to scorch as well as shine ; but when relapsing into what appeared to be its more natural moods it was scarcely possible to resist the seductions of her eloquence. Even the doctrines which, half in gaiety, and half in haughty acceptance of the character assigned to her, she promulgated, full of poetical epicureanism, came with so sweet an harmony from her lips that saints could not have wished them mended.

Alfonso continued to play his own part, but he lost not a single word nor gesture of the lady ; and his regrets increased every moment with his admiration. He observed too,—and without the pleasure which men should take in a friend's happiness,—that her choicest smiles were showered upon the young English noble, who, although he had usually a good deal of attention to spare from the fair sex to his own very handsome person, seemed to have neither eyes, nor ears, nor understanding, for any form, sound, or utterance but Lucrezia's. Scarcely past the childhood of love, he was already in its dotage : his soul drank in the beams of her loveliness as a palm-tree absorbs the fervid light of Africa—immoveable with passionate enjoyment ! The Hospitaller's dissatisfaction was still more intense when he remembered that Le Beaufort was still deceived with regard to the real

personage of the fairy who had treated him with such freedom in the carnival.

Gaiety and convivial enjoyment seemed the only feelings in Cæsar's breast, although his demeanour to Lucrezia was not calculated to dispel the ideas which were known to possess some of the guests. Even the saturnine wit of Machiavelli took lively colours in reflecting back that of Lucrezia; but the epicurean Bembo was in a paradise of delight, and defended himself but faintly against an accusation which Machiavelli urged on him, that he had avowed a determination to make Donna Lucrezia as immortal as Petrarca's Laura, in his verses.

"Inasmuch as hopelessness was Petrarca's muse, certes I may boast the same," said Bembo, warmly. "But would to Heaven that my verse could sufficiently please your grace to obtain me even a glory so mournful."

"Nay, Messer canon, methinks this life is long enough to be unhappy in," replied Lucrezia, with a playful sarcasm, in which there mingled the sigh of a deeper feeling.

"Madama, it is impossible to escape your immortality," said Duke Guidobaldo. "Even now, Messer Pietro has in his doublet, fairly penned on a perfumed and flowered parchment, a matchless canzonet in your praise."

"Let us hear it, Messer Pietro—since among you it is determined I must appear at the bar of posterity," said Lucrezia, and after the usual modest denials and defences, the fascinated canon produced a canzone, which we may quote as a specimen of the artificial

court style in which Messer Bembo prided himself in excelling.

CANZONE.

Immortals ! when of old
 Pandora with all gifts ye did endow,—
 Thy rainbow brow,
 And eyes in which *light lives*, Love's mother, thou ;
 Cupid, thy bow to form the rosy part
 Whence arrowy smiles might dart ;
 Pallas, thy wit ; Diana, thy chaste bliss
 So perfect that it knows not that it is !—
 Who thought the gods, like sculptors skilled,
 Could in a second mould improve the first,
 Making a lovelier in Lucrezia now ?
 The ancient fable more than truth ?
 Perfection perfected ?—completion filled ?
 Hebe give fresher than her freshest youth ?
 But with this bettered best we have a worsened worst !
 For all the ills Pandora's box
 Could yield—the thousand natural shocks—
 More anguish work her subtle charms,
 More infinite griefs and harms,
 For, oh, antique Lucretia ! in thine
 Lingered the comforter divine,
 While our Pandora still to all denies
 Hope !—without which love cannot cease—yet dies !

During the recitation of this elaborate inspiration Lucrezia listened with a kind of absent smile ; and when it was concluded, and the poet expected his meed of thanks, she began to utter them—but suddenly her voice faltered, and tears rushed in a sparkling shower to her eyes.

“Sannazzaro writes not thus of me!—and the syrens of his native Parthenope have taught him so sweet a warble to his verse, that posterity will listen with a pleased ear,” she said, laughing with disdain at her own weakness, and yet with tears, so that her cheeks resembled carnations in the sun after a shower. “And yet this is of a fair sound, too!—we would fain have with us some of the masters of the future thoughts of men.—Messer Niccolò, what deem you of your schoolfellow’s verse?”

“As of my schoolfellow’s, lady,” replied Machiavelli, smiling.

“It is too Lombard for Messer Niccolò’s taste. He permits no phrase that cannot be found in bright Boccaccio,” said the young cardinal of Medici.

“These trifles lose their appreciation in ears that have been long out of Florence, and grown familiar in their wanderings with all the other dialects of Italy, Eminence,” replied Niccolò, with a smile of peculiar meaning to the brother of the exiled Pier. “But I marvel to hear your most reverend lordship recommend Boccaccio so warmly, as an it were of as profitable perusal as some holy breviary.”

“Men look not in breviaries for good language, sir secretary, but good divinity—though I have not heard you look in them for aught,” replied the young cardinal.

“What occasion, my lord, when we see how zealously the ministers of religion preach it by example?” said Machiavelli.

Cæsar interrupted this sharp interchange by proposing a ballet, to which Lucrezia languidly assented,

and the brilliant company trooped out into the meadow before the grotto. The religious knight, who was also in heavy garniture, of course declined any share in the revelry; but Paolo Orsino eagerly offered himself as Lucrezia's partner. To his surprise and evident chagrin she replied, in an absent manner, by declaring that she had already danced so much that day as to be too weary; and then observing a sudden glance which Alfonso cast at her, full of some strange intelligence, Paolo retired in silent wrath.

Cæsar's vigilant eye probably noted the whole scene, and perceiving that the Orsino strolled discontentedly away from the revellers, he took an opportunity, and quietly glided after him, into a singular winding maze of myrtles.

Hearing steps the moody lover turned, and recognizing Cæsar awaited his approach, perhaps more in suspicion than in respect.

"Chance is my friend, Lord Paolo; I knew not by what means, unobservedly, to win your private ear," said the duke, very graciously, and even affectionately. "Our Lady be thanked!—I have now an occasion for which I have long prayed, to convince your noble house of the sincerity of my goodwill to it, and desire to conclude its projected alliance with ours."

"Signor, it needs no assurances.—The sudden coldness of his holiness to ourselves—his open scorn on our allies—the Lady Lucrezia's contempt—are matters that speak for themselves!" replied Paolo, with infinite bitterness.

“ I do mistrust that it is yonder buckram from Ferrara that makes our sire so stiff ! ” returned Cæsar, and Paolo’s start confessed how suddenly the insinuation found entry into his mind. “ Nay, I have more than suspicion in warrantry for believing that the Hospitaller’s uncourtly refusals are but to blind suspicion—that under veil of the foolish farce, at which we all clapped hands to-night, Lucrezia gave this man an audience, to listen to renewed proposals from Ferrara.”

“ Signor, if you deem so, and are sincere in your promises to us, you will on the moment drive him back to his insolent master ! ” exclaimed the Orsino, instantly and vehemently excited.

“ I am not the master in Rome ; moreover, this is a mission with whose secret import only the pontiff and Lucrezia are acquainted, but we all behold the effects,” replied Cæsar. “ Yet for the sincerity of my intents, this confidence may vouch ; and, moreover, I frankly avow that if I saw not my own interests in yours you should have sought it in some other quarter. To be briefly tedious—I have conceived a great project, to which the alliance with Ferrara would be fatal, and to succeed in which I cannot hope without yours.”

“ I would refuse few matters short of my honour or life to have this demonstrated, signor ! ” said Paolo, eagerly.

“ To begin then where—’tis strange—yet few men do—even at the beginning,” said Cæsar ; “ I have discovered (it was at Bracciano) that it is in vain to hope to found a dominion among these hills of Romulus ;

—frankly, your tusks defend your pork so well, that 'tis out of hope—though that be infinite—to make a roast of ye ! Patience !—I shall come to a point anon ! Of late, his hot holiness being angry with Ferrara, we were wont to discourse together how that, albeit usurped from the church, the lands on the Po are as much to be found in the bequest of the Countess Matilda (Heaven keep her silly ghost !) as any of those on Tiber, which ye grasp so tightly ! Moreover, they lie as it were in one hug with my possessions in Romagna, and with Bologna—but I speak not of the sausage-makers now—they are your friends ;—and thereupon flattering me with fine toys of winning the ducal crown of Ferrara, to set upon these brows of mine, by aid of your potent alliance,—his paternity wiled me of my consent into his project of marrying his daughter into your house—which, I will confess, I had till then opposed as the ruin of all my hopes.”

“ My lord, if I have thought so, you will pardon the jealousies of one who hath so priceless a good in chase, that he fears a rival even in the stirring of the wind ! ” replied the Orsino, struck with the candour of the avowal.

“ But all is changed since these accursed Ferrarese set foot in Rome ! ” exclaimed Cæsar. “ The pontiff discourses strangely with me.—And wherefore delays he this marriage, to effect which doubtless he invited you to Rome ? ”

“ His holiness bids me win his heavenly daughter's consent, and I have his own,” returned the startled Orsino.

“Once he was not wont to ask her pleasure, but bade her do his—a true Spanish father!” said Cæsar. “But how progress you with the lady?—By all mankind’s! I think she gives your love but such frosty sunshine as rather blasts than feeds the vine.”

Paolo’s dismal aspect acknowledged the truth of the observation.

“Ha, and it cannot be mere maiden modesty,” continued Cæsar, laughing again. “So haughty-fair a dame, in whose veins flows the aspiring BORGIAN blood, were like enough to prefer the sovereignty of Ferrara even to your as potent vassalage.—Have we not all remarked how, despite his feigned slights, she still pours the full sunshine of her kindness on this emissary?”

“He did her some service—more indeed by chance than will;—your grace remembers our accursed chase of the buffalo?” said Paolo, hurriedly. “But if I thought—if I had proof of this treachery!” he continued fiercely, and clutching the hilt of his dagger; when Cæsar interrupted by gently grasping his arm, and whispering in a mild and reproaching tone, “Signor—he saved your life!”

“’Tis true!—’tis very true!” returned the Orsino, somewhat ashamedly, and relinquishing his hold. “But if he would take it again—if he would deprive me of the only hope which renders life pleasant to me—life sufferable!—hath he not cancelled the obligation?”

“But not on suspicions—when certainties themselves would scarcely excuse—should men rush to

extremities of such import!" said Cæsar. "Yet I own it were bitter to you if the envoy should succeed, (and 'tis like enough, seeing how offended his holiness is with the insolence of your allies—Vittellozzo, in especial,) why then, I say, it were no pleasing office for you, as the greatest of the Roman barons, to hold the haughty bridegroom's stirrup as he mounts to go to church."

"When that hour comes—but your grace is pleased to make me your fool and mock!" exclaimed the Orsino, with flashing eyes.

"My good angel grant, if I have one, that I am not myself made Fortune's idiot in this matter!" said Cæsar, speaking thickly, as if half choked with indignation.

"Your highness is known to be a poet, and these fears may be but visions of your fertile imagination," replied Paolo.

"As I have told you, I but doubtfully affirm this man's purposes—for I repeat, my Paolo, I am not admitted into the core of their mysteries.—It is in vain to deny what all the world hath long whispered, that his holiness's heart is not so entire with me as it was once;—the old man dreams only of the aggrandizement of his dotage, his superb melon-flower, as he calls her,—his daughter!" said Cæsar, with unaffected bitterness. "But will it not seem strange if, after granting the envoy this interview to-night, alone, in these gardens,—to-morrow she exhibits a sudden change to coldness and distance with him?—Ask me not whence I derive my thought—but use your own eyes."

“Alone!—in these gardens!” muttered the Orsino.

“The power is in your hands to confirm or remove our fears!” said Cæsar, tranquilly remarking the effect of his insinuations. “Use it;—for opportunity, as Niccolò will tell you, but that you love him not, hath only a lock of hair in front whereby to be seized. Demand the immediate fulfilment of the promised nuptials, backed by the overawing of all your mighty confederacy. Let the pontiff know that you have the power and dare to use it—in a short time it will melt away in your hands!”

The Orsino looked at Cæsar, almost staggered into some belief in his sincerity, above all cajoled by the allurements held out of the immediate gratification of the fierce passion which raged in his rich Roman blood—for though we speak of love these epithets only can be applied to the maddening desire which Lucrezia’s supreme beauty kindled.

Still he replied with hesitation—“Signor, you speak of dethroning one of the most powerful and ancient of the princes of Italy, as an it were but stretching out your hand to pluck a ripe fig!—And one in close alliance with the victorious King of France!”

“And therefore the more mine enemy!—unless I buy a return of the favour I have forfeited by promoting the alliance with Ferrara, which Louis hath always so earnestly sought, with intent to secure to such faithful friends all that should be mine—which his holiness will joyfully heap on his daughter’s husband!” returned Cæsar, passionately. “But the

republic of Florence is equally protected by France; and yet the friends of Pier de' Medici do not despair to see the golden balls glistening once more over the portals of the Signory!"

"But the friends of Messer Niccolò of Florence are not likely to aid in any such enterprize!" said Paolo, once more very dubiously.

"I desire only that men should believe in my actions—for words are air, and impossibilities are as easily shaped in them as aught feasible," replied the subtle Borgia. "Let us keep from these revellers, Paolo;—the very leaves must not hear me now, lest they whisper it again! If thou wilt apply the test we have devised,—if we find the reality of our suspicions,—if thou wilt enter into this compact with me, that Ferrara shall be mine,—as preliminaries and hostages of faith I consent that we will unitedly restore the Medici in Florence, and compel the pontiff to ratify the marriage between yourself and Lucrezia—if it be true that so wise a politician sets store on such a trifle as a woman, more or less."

"These are still but words, my lord, in which you have well said that impossibilities are possible," replied the Orsino.

"But I will give you things.—I was about to say—what was it?—I am overwhelmed by a sea of thoughts;—nay, not overwhelmed, but much betossed," said Cæsar, musingly. "To the matter!—thou knowest how valuable the city of Arezzo is to the Florentines; what a thorn it was in their sides until they subdued it,—being so equally near to

themselves and their enemies the Vitelli, at Castello?"

"I have not forgotten mine own name, signor, nor these matters," returned the Orsino, coldly.

"But thou knowest not that when I was warring in Tuscany, came to me secretly two of its chief citizens, with offer to raise the city against the Florentines, if I would sanction the enterprize?" said Cæsar. "Your friends were then not mine, and I refused; but with all my friendship with Niccolò I betrayed not those worthy gentlemen, who still go about in Arezzo with their heads on their shoulders."

"Something—'tis true—I have heard of this," said the Orsino, now much shaken.

"A word of mine could re-stir this action—a warning that the republic has information of their treason ripens it at once—if Vitellozzo would promise aid from Castello," continued the Borgia. "That word shall be uttered as soon as I am convinced of the reality of my fears. A successful revolt would rally all the partisans of the Medici,—the French will be soon too busy in Naples to obstruct us,—and together we will invade Tuscany,—restore Pier,—and thus mightily strengthened, think you the pontiff would dare to refuse his daughter to your victorious arms?"

Artfully dovetailed as this project seemed to be, still if he had not been blinded with passion the sagacious Orsino would probably have discerned many flaws or unstable junctions in it. As it was, he endeavoured to adjourn any positive resolution by

reverting to his doubts of the pretended mission from Ferrara—the basis on which the whole structure stood; but Cæsar, craftily adapting himself to this mood, urged that he should make the assay which he had proposed, and rouse all the confederacy to an united and peremptory demand for the fulfilment of the understood compact in the alliance between their leader and the lady of the Borgias. Unable of course even to conjecture the extraordinary discoveries which Cæsar imagined he had made, and which secretly actuated him, Paolo could divine no reason to suspect his sincerity in thus accelerating the measures once so unpalatable to him, and for the dangerous confidence reposed in his enemies. Finally, he consented at least to propose the matter to the barons, so far as related to the expediency of demanding an immediate conclusion of the marriage; the rest being withheld until the result was ascertained on which it depended.

In the midst of the discussion on this latter point, which passed chiefly in whispers, the distant music of the revelry, which had hitherto never ceased, suddenly came to a pause which attracted Cæsar's attention.

"Surely Lucrezia has taken the pet at our long absence, and broken up the festival!" he exclaimed. "Let us hasten to learn; and meanwhile, in token of our new brotherhood, let us embrace, Paolo—and separate. Is it possible!—do you wear steel beneath satin?" he continued, releasing Paolo from a fraternal pressure.

"And take antidotes before all my meals—and

sleep in chambers so barred and guarded that even the invisible slayers of young Salerno can hardly come at my throat!" replied the Orsino, with a gloomy glance at the unruffled visage of Cæsar.

"And you do well—for in truth the Romans have not misnamed my sister—the Fatal Bride!" returned he gaily. "But she is an apple to be gathered on a holiday, even at the risk of clasping the devil's burning hand out of the leaves instead!"

The Orsino smiled with an effort, and the new allies, wending their way out of the maze, separated as they approached the light of the revelry.

"And now," mused Cæsar, with a long, scornful gaze after his late companion; "and now—will he take our damsel in the raw of her late strange discomfiture, and she will turn as restive as an unman-aged barb.—And his holiness is not yet so subdued to the quality of milk that he may not be stirred to anger by the first rude shock of the power he would confirm to his rebels. The Vitelli busied at Arezzo—the Orsini irritating the French in attempting to reseate their cousin—the war of Naples imminent—the cards are once more in my hands!"

CHAPTER XI.

“ I have thought
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,
In its own eddy boiling and o’erwrought,
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame.”

BYRON.

MINGLING with the first group of revellers whom he encountered, Paolo learned that Cæsar’s conjecture was well founded, so far as related to Lucrezia, who had suddenly retired with a few persons of her suite, but commanding that the festival should continue as long as it pleased those who shared it. He looked around instantly for the Hospitaller, and perceived him standing almost in the precise attitude and place where he had left him ; but Sir Reginald had been chosen by the lady to escort her to her litter.

All interest in the scene instantly vanished from Paolo’s breast, and he gave immediate orders for his retinue to assemble and depart, impatiently waiting for the duke’s reappearance to take his farewell. The bustle seemed to startle the Hospitaller from a waking dream, and he also hastened to quit the valley.

He had not gone far when he met Le Beaufort, returning from his honourable service—and, contrary to all custom, so lost in thought that when Alfonso suddenly paused in his way he started back as if he had not in the least observed his approach.

“Soh!—her favour extended not so far—as yet—as to invite you to accompany her to Rome?” said Alfonso, with a deep pang as he observed Le Beaufort’s somewhat guilty blush. “And yet your close conference this hour might have settled a weightier matter.”

“I pray you jest not thus with me, my lord, and brother-in-arms!” replied Sir Reginald, testily.

“What, brother Reginald! that hadst ever a hawk’s eye for the meanest game, dost pretend thou wouldst have denied this peerless dame so small a request?” said Alfonso, with an ironical laugh.

“No, nor my heart’s blood, if she demanded it!” said Le Beaufort, enthusiastically. “But you speak, my lord, of the betrothed of my friend;—yet, in good faith, she might have honoured me to be her escort, but that it pleases her, late as the hour is, to visit her confessor in his hermitage on some hill they call Aventine,—and takes with her as few attendants as possible.”

“Indeed, indeed!—why, yes, ’tis late!” said Alfonso, somewhat wildly. “Midnight, I think;—what wouldst thou give, brother, to be this lady’s confessor?”

“Nay, that office were more to your taste, being a Knight of St. John,” replied Le Beaufort, quite unconscious of the Hospitaller’s insinuation. “But

yet, by'r Lady! were it not for Paolo, I would give the whole world to be anything that never left her!—To be a flower in her bosom, though I sicklied and died there!—a bird to sing in a cage when she was at 'broidery!—a hound to lie at her feet, and be patted by her eider-down hand!—a pillow on which to rest her warm cheek!—And, oh, how lovingly I would press around the dint of its gracious rest!”

“Let Paolo look to it;—for thou wilt smother his betrothed, if sorcery be not incapable of the transformation!” said Alfonso, stung at heart, and determined if possible to take away what he more than concluded to be a groundwork for these rapturous fancies. “And tell me truly, brother, did not the Fairy Morgana offer thee some such assistance?”

Le Beaufort's ingenuous countenance coloured again, as he replied with hesitation, “She promised—success in all things, and to all men, that they dared undertake—and invited me like the rest to visit her in her Palace of Fallacy.”

“Shame on thee, then, that had not the courage to remind her of her promise—as perchance she meant when she made you her escort to-night!” returned Alfonso, with singular vehemence.

“Shame on thee to speak thus of so honourable a lady—but that 'tis in jest,” said Le Beaufort, also warmly. “Such fair sayings are but meant as the pace-eggs which we colour beautifully in my land, to crush at Easter in mock tilts.—Things not to be remembered.—And yet it was strange how anxiously she inquired how men liked her pageant and her sayings—would have me describe her look, her ges-

tures, her very words—though in faith and troth it made me redden like a winter-berry to repeat some!”

“Nay, then, thou wert not so mere a beginner as to deny her the opening which her promise gave to offer—fulfilment?” replied the irritated knight.

“Not purposely—it stumbled forth, I know not how,” said Sir Reginald, with perfect integrity of look. “And we both but laughed at the quaint fancy of it—and it was then that you saw her whisper to me, for I noted your eye upon us—and she bade me tell you the story, with a mock that she desired to know what the fairy had promised to you, as she meant to keep all the promises of Morgana herself.”

Alfonso looked incredulously at Sir Reginald for an instant, and then with a heart which beat in thick throbs, he exclaimed almost with contempt, “Boy! and didst thou miss the meaning of that!—Go to, go to; thou wilt not understand her when—but it matters not; the Orsino is fortunate in such a rival.”

“By the bonny broom, though—if one had kissed me as thou reportedst the girl of these grottoes—nymphs is it ye call them?—kissed thee—in faith, I had had more to boast of, or I had not boasted so much!” exclaimed the young knight, vehemently. “Oh, fie, fie!—in England, kiss and tell goes to a warning rhyme.”

“Do thou be secret then of thy farther fortunes; she is no icicle thou hast to deal with!” said Alfonso, shuddering with suppressed fury. “Go now

to thy friend, as I will to mine inn, which I use for my covering and convenience."

With this covert gibe the ancient brothers-in-arms separated with much less than their usual cordiality—Le Beaufort the more indignant perhaps at the suspicions insinuated, because his throbbing pulses half confessed that they were not unfounded. Alfonso meanwhile hurried on, forming a new project which his recent success in a similar one suggested, for he was now animated by a frenzy which no consideration of danger or difficulty, or even right or decency, could resist. One of his most terrible suspicions had been overthrown, but with such confirmation of a worse—the worst!—as Cæsar's black jealousy bestowed; yet still Alfonso felt an imperative necessity to obtain positive proof to give his soul the least hope of calm. Lucrezia had gone to her confessor, and remembering the circumstances of the locality, Alfonso followed.

He made such good speed that when he came within sight of the gigantic ruins of Caracalla's Baths, he perceived by the advancing torches which the horsemen of her guard carried that Lucrezia's retinue had not reached them. Approaching nearer he observed them halt near the ruins, and in a few moments the lady, muffled in a dark Spanish mantilla, descended from the litter, received by a bobbing, quivering monk, in whom Alfonso easily recognized Fra Biccocco. Escorted by him she walked hastily into the ruins, disappearing soon in their intricacies; and recalling all the observations he had made on his former visit, Alfonso wound his way

from the rear to the same point, so that none of the retinue, who were laughing and criticising the festival among themselves, discerned him. Thence he rapidly threaded his way to the chamber in which he had shared Fra Biccocco's hospitality, through which the lady and her guide had just passed; boldly followed into the opening from which Bruno's cell was reached, and laid down among the long grass, befriended by the darkness, until Biccocco descended from his accomplished task, returning into his abode proper. Alfonso then sprang up, and in a few instants was at his former post of observation, looking into Fra Bruno's hermitage or laboratory, whichever it was.

The confessor himself had been as far from anticipating one arrival as the other, which those who had seen him some time before it happened would have acknowledged. For hours he had been seated at his large stone table, which was covered with open volumes of ponderous manuscript, nearly all in the learned or in eastern languages, perusing what seemed likely to prove an addition to their number—a huge sheet of parchment, headed in large characters, which Biccocco in his devote admiration had carefully illuminated,

“*De Prædestinatione.*”

For some minutes the theologian had leaned himself exhaustedly back in his chair, but still holding his pen in hand, as if meditating farther exploits.

“This, then, was the thesis,” he mused half aloud, after the manner of solitary thinkers, as if essaying

the effect on themselves of their own arguments. “‘PRÆDESTINATIONE NECESSITAT’—and yet—‘INJUSTUS NON EST DEUS.’ Fate is inevitable, but God is just; these are the terms. Sanctus Augustinus, ad Sixtum, dixit—” and then he paused in too rapid a series of thought for words. “Yes, Saint Augustin said it;—and is it a demon or an angel in thy soul, Bruno, which would have thee believe it? Vanitas vanitatum!—vainest of all sciences—science of words—theology! And do they hang on my lips for the echo of heavenly oracles—echoes only of the dreams of men—when in every human heart—no, no, let us not look in the heart for the will of God! It is not there—it is—where? In these musty parchments, or in yonder sweet air, which wooes me forth to rejoice in the beauty of the night? Get thee behind me, Satan!—what have I to do with beauty in any form?—Satan, I spit at thee.

“*Meritum hominis nullum est*;—why then,—yes, it were just if man’s offences were also nothing—not to be imputed to him—more than his deservings! And if it was eternally thus—eternally damned or eternally saved—follows it not—wherefore make this short pause of existence a part of the futurity of hell, if it must be—that might be at least a short glimpse of Heaven? Wherefore, Bruno—O wretch, O monster! what devil is whispering thee! Yet let us not be afraid of reason—or, fiend, dost thou take its form? Let us reason. Is love in itself a crime? *Deus amor est*!—no. What, then, is criminal in love?—Priest, answer. But wert thou not first a man? And what is a man, mere man? A beast!

from which degradation thou hast rescued thyself—to sit on a frozen eminence, and see mankind rejoice in the warm valleys beneath. Yet to be *in wisdom as a god*—this is something! Yea, this is something—”

He paused, and the perfect stillness of the desert Aventine permitted some breathings of the remote music of the revelry in the valley of Egeria to come to his hearing; and after listening for a moment, he arose and traversed his cell with a rapid step.

“They are around her now in revelry—they gaze upon her with their gloating eyes—perchance her warm blood kindles too in the contagion!—but no, no, when that befalls!—What is it to thee, Fra Bruno? Not only tyranny took—O, slave, thou didst abdicate all right! Measureless sacrifice!—and yet again abandonest the task for which it was decreed!—What task?—When Heaven itself takes his part!—When thou darest not proclaim its behests, and he holds up his hands to stay the thunder, and it pauses!—Let us to our words again; let us not think. Yet at the worst, torture immortal were not too great a penalty to pay if—old man!—emacrated friar!—what is this thou ravest? Even the conclusion of the thesis: *Non perseverantes usque in finem non sunt prædestinati*!—that is all.”

At this point, when the theologian was about to continue his disquisition, having resumed his pen and place, voices were audible, and Biccocco entered, having scarcely time to announce Donna Lucrezia ere she followed.

“A fair even, father,—be not startled;—I was re-

turning from my gardens of Egeria, and I have brought your altar some of its choicest flowers," she said, in a reverential and timid voice, producing at the same time a superb nosegay. "Moreover, I would speak a few words alone with you—Father Biccocco, with your good allowance."

The worthy friar, looking at her as she threw back her mantle on her shoulders with a goggle of intense admiration, and almost wonder that there could be anything so beautiful, respectfully prepared to obey.

"Biccocco!—I command thee, stay!" exclaimed Fra Bruno, starting up. "I would say—nay, daughter, is it thou?—I knew not at first—Biccocco, I bade thee let none trouble me—but, tears?—What ails our gentle penitent? Hath she forgotten a whole string of aves? Or what heavier offence? It was but yesterday I counselled with thee. But a few hours is much to a woman;—wherefore glow thy cheeks thus with this fire of shame?—Biccocco, leave us."

"Father, I have sinned—yes, in these few hours have grievously sinned," said the bright penitent, melting into a passion of tears as soon as the restraint of Biccocco's presence was removed, and little aware of the listener who succeeded. "I have sinned—but I repent, and even in mine offence have found its chastisement."

"Art thou then well assured that it is repentance—not regret?" replied the monk. "Thy sex doth oft mistake one for the other. But what is the matter

—surely it might not hinder thee of thy needful rest—might bide the light, to listen to—for, indeed, thou art now strangely pale !”

“I have been mad, my father !—I know not what I have done !—I dare not look at you and tell you ; let me arrange my flowers in your chalices while I speak,” replied Lucrezia, hiding her face in the fragrant bundle.

“Not so—the eye and look oft confesses more than the apologising lip,” returned the confessor, now evidently startled. “Kneel in thy wonted place ; no other attitude becomes thy dignity or mine ; for either thou kneelest to the servant of God, or debasest thyself before the brother of man.”

Lucrezia complied instantly, and the Penitentiary throwing himself back in his chair, fixed his eyes on the crucifix before him, without even glancing at his penitent.

“Father, you—you warned me—would I had taken heed !” she began, still weepingly. “I had not suffered this shame—but my vanity !—it was but my vanity. You warned me of all the ills that would happen—by all that have happened—never even to look at him again. How wicked it was, I knew, for the Knights of St. John are almost priests !—but it stung my proud soul to the quick to think that he should despise and publicly scorn me !”

“Of whom speak we now ? What is all this, daughter ?” said Fra Bruno, turning very pale, and glancing with a degree of fierceness mingled with astonishment at the penitent.

“The Hospitaller who saved my life.—Ah, father, you know not what women feel when—the cold Knight of St. John, my father!”

“Well, what of him?—thou hast not had him harmed for his faithfulness to his vows?” returned the Dominican, hurriedly.

“Harmed! I would rather myself perish in some very cruel way than any ill should befall him,” exclaimed the penitent.

“Then, indeed, thou hast committed a deadly crime!—A darker adultery of the soul!” said Fra Bruno, wildly. “Nay, my child, I speak too harshly now. But what hast thou more to say? Time wears, and this soft cheek should be upon the down, or its sweetness will not blow so freshly as some of its rivals at dawn. Thou seest, this hermitage from which thou wouldst lure me yields me some recollections to brighten its desolation.—What is it thou wouldst say?”

“How shall I say it—that am ashamed to think it?” said Lucrezia, hesitatingly. “But yes, yes, thou didst behold—thou wilt remember—in the carnival to-day—”

“They said thou wert the actress in sooth of an evil part; and but that thou didst it perchance to flaunt the Orsini, it pained me, indeed, to witness thy folly with the English boy,” said Fra Bruno.

“The fairy deceived you then as well as others,—I know not why, assuming my part, and so completely as to deceive the Orsini themselves,” replied Lucrezia, clasping her soft hands on the bony one with which the friar grasped the arm of his chair. “But

be not very angry with me, father!—I played even a worse—oh, far worse!—I feared, alas! that you knew me!—remember you not that wicked, wicked ballerina?”

Fra Bruno was for a moment silent, and then said in a cold undertone, as if endeavouring to recollect, “Methinks I saw some such vessel of infamy—some such unhappy lostness—lasciviously disporting to win the gaze of a ruffianly mob at the Capitol.”

“Nay, now you wrong her—you wrong me, Fra Bruno!—lasciviously, what is that?” exclaimed Lucrezia, with some indignation. “What did I do to merit such a word?”

“Thou!—daughter, thou!—what ails thee?—are we awake?” said Bruno, snatching his hand furiously away.

“Nay, dearest father, nay, but hear me!” continued Lucrezia, in spite of his wrath regaining his hand, and holding it between her own. “I intended but to win him to—to some foolish meeting—wherein I intended to expose him to the just laughter of my court.”

“A wise project;—and whither, pray you, Eve’s true descendant?” said the monk, more mildly.

“In the grotto of Egeria.”

“The grotto of Egeria!—and so he refused thy lures, and thou art vexed to have escaped perdition?” returned the Penitentiary.

“Nay,—for he came.”

“He came!—jest not in such a matter as this!—thou knowest his certain destruction—new horrors—more blood—rave not, my daughter, madness like

this—for again the direful gulf will open!—thou knowest I have cause, too, to love—to wish this man well;—at least this one!” said Bruno, somewhat incoherently.

“’Tis that emboldens me—and the immediacy of the danger,” said Lucrezia. “I must needs avow my whole offence. He came and——”

“Why dost thou pause?—and what? Daughter, what means this silence?” said the friar, now so much agitated, that, but that she was equally so, Lucrezia must have observed it.

“He came—contemned—despised me, mistaking indeed for another—but not the less despising me in both persons,” wept Lucrezia. “And then—oh, my father, I have confessed to thee things—but never aught so strangely mad!—because that I would have him share some offence to justify the clamour I had provided—scarcely I know how to believe it now myself. I did to his—brow—what I now do to your hand!” And she kissed it with profound reverence and many tears.

“Thou!—and yet again, thou!—not yet a proclaimed harlot!—not yet set in the first line of the Book of Shame!—thou, a woman, an all-wooded beauty, a Borgia!” shouted the confessor, convulsively starting at every word of his own climax. “Begone, begone—tell me no more—madden me not with the rest—the certainty of thy damnation!—Begone!—revel out the dream, and wake in the everlasting flames! Begone!—or something prompts me that it were even now a holy and an acceptable

work to stop thy downward rush—even—even with death !”

“My father! what mean you?—what say you?” exclaimed Lucrezia, colouring fervently. “Oh, indeed, indeed, your suspicion shows me all my ignominy. But, dearest my father!—even then—then—he did but suffer because he wotted not in the darkness mine intent.”

“The darkness !”

“Yes—but I know how he despised and hated me for it—when afterwards he made me a jest and scorn to all by relating how it was snatched from him—how he would have repulsed it.”

“It is impossible!—it is impossible as to clasp the plague till it is rotten, and share not the contagion!” exclaimed the monk. “Woman, thou mockest me—but, remember, not me alone. His brow? Thou couldst not reach it unless it bent to thee;—darest thou prevaricate with Heaven?”

“Father, I said—said I not his lips?—though indeed his brow would better have contented me—but so it chanced,” said Lucrezia, shrinking with a mixture of shame and fear from Fra Bruno’s eyes.

“Why then—let us have the rest of the truth, since we improve thus in the re-telling,” said the friar, with wonderful bitterness. “Hope not to deceive me!—though thou art of woman’s perfect stature, but that he bent to meet thy shamelessness, this might not be.”

“Deem you so, father,—is it certain?” said the penitent, with an eagerness so natural and yet so

betraying, that though she could not repress it, the manifestation renewed her confusion.

"I am of his stature," exclaimed the Dominican, half raising his tall, attenuated figure—and then sinking back with a low laugh of unutterable self-derision.

"Thou, father!—ay, but for thy clerkly bend,—his head is loftier, and set as firmly as that of Mars!" she replied. "But wilt not thou forgive me—wilt not thou at least return with a kiss of pardon this of penitence?"

And once more she raised the friar's hand with touching humility to her lips.

"Of pardon!—no, no, no; go, thou art very vile—what—but just from that unhallowed scene!—Begone, I say!—go to thy sire!—only his supremacy can forgive sins multiplied like thine till the condemning angel closes the record, knowing thou hast incurred the worst!—Begone!"

"What ravest thou now! Indeed, but now thou ravest, Friar Bruno! Priest, what meanest thou now?" exclaimed Lucrezia, starting up with sudden indignation. "Thou to whom I have confessed all—thou to taunt me thus! What mean you? Then I will to him myself and warn him of his danger—for during all the meeting the Duke of Romagna was concealed, and watched us from one of the ivy hollows in the cave."

"The Duke of Romagna!" exclaimed the friar, with evident amazement. "Why then—nay, all is well;—and yet how came he there?"

"He did believe—or feigned—nay—he believed

that I was really the wandering thing I seemed—overheard my messenger—I know not what,” said Lucrezia, tremulously. “But ’tis therefore I would have the Hospitaller warned against Cæsar’s malice and revenge.”

“Cæsar were not like to cherish either if it be true that the knight treated thee with insult and scorn,” replied the friar.

“Yea,—but himself betrayed that I—I have told all, father; but methought the knight would scarcely have revealed—which else Cæsar could scarcely have suspected—my marvellous madness, when as I said—”

“It needs not—I have heard it,” interrupted the monk hurriedly. “But dost thou truly repent?—does that fair bosom heave now with the freshening winds of penitence, or the ground-swell of a passion which hath exhausted itself even by its own violence?”

“I will undertake what penance pleases you, father; but—I would fain that he were warned of danger,” replied the lady, evasively, but kneeling again with earnest entreaty at the friar’s feet. “I would—if it must be—that he should quit Rome.”

“It is in vain—I have already exhausted persuasion on him—he hath an errand in Rome which he will fulfil at every risk,” replied Fra Bruno, musingly.

“And, father, dost thou also know it?” exclaimed Lucrezia, with a startled expression.

“And who knows—being the marvellous man that he is—but that Heaven intends, by pouring on thee

its bitterest vial of love despised, to make thee willingly take to the shelter I have so often pointed out to thee from the storms of the world—which thy fatal beauty—which thy ill renown—which the crimes thou hast caused, and mayest still—the vasty projects to which thou art the stumbling-block—all would urge thee into?” continued the monk, absorbedly. “Know it!—what know you, daughter? Surely thou dost not know his purposes in Rome?”

“Himself has told me—the envoy of Ferrara—to prove against me—to prove me to be—learned father, if there be any word would raise the fiend,—and yet he comes to prove I am the thing!” exclaimed Lucrezia, cowering her face on the monk’s hand.

“Take comfort, daughter; he cannot,” replied the Dominican, bending over her, and speaking in so low a tone that the devouring listener could not distinguish the words.

“But, my father, you forgive me?” said Lucrezia, looking up with a somewhat comforted visage, but suddenly starting as she met the gaze of Fra Bruno. He was silent.

“Speak, you frighten me!—answer me, father!—is it too great an offence—what penance—Blessed Lady!—is he struck with death!—Biccocco!”

“Peace, peace, nothing ails me!—fasting, and too long thought and this anguish!—Salve me, Jesu!—Thy first husband, Lucrezia!—leave me: you poison the very air!—leave me, terrible woman!—Darest thou—with all thy passions still palpitating thus—Oh, Lucrezia!—Light eddies round me!—To stifle

me thus — *Domine, an me reliquisti?* — Beautiful fiend! begone.”

“Forgive me, father! — dearest father! — or I shall never sleep again,” said Lucrezia, with a caressing and supplicating gesture, in evident and complete ignorance of the nature of the Dominican’s agitation, and affrighted by the idea that the magnitude of her offence had kindled it.

“Forgive thee! — heavenly Lucrezia! Some sign now! Now let the thunder descend or —” The raving exclamation was cut short by a sound not altogether unressembling that imprecated: a large block of ruin, dislodged by a sudden and violent movement of the unseen auditor, rolled with a hollow rumble into the vaults below.

The Dominican started up from the benediction which he was bending forward to pronounce — almost dashed Lucrezia away — rushed to his altar — and throwing himself prostrate before the divine symbol which adorned it, “Blessed be Thy name for ever and for ever! — Gloria Domino! Gloria in Excelsis! Praise ye the Lord! — He saves in the furnace of fire!” he exclaimed in a frantic ecstasy of devotion, and for some minutes was lost in prayer too intense for words.

Lucrezia meanwhile, completely panic-struck and astonished, arose and gazed at the friar in mute dismay; and when at length he raised himself and turned towards her — but that he kept his own eyes steadily fixed on the ground, the womanly unconsciousness of her whole look and attitude might have

shown him that the apology he uttered was scarcely necessary—while it utterly clashed with all Alfonso's dominant ideas.

“Think nought of this—but as of a grief which—thy soul is infinitely precious in my love!—but go now; go, Lucrezia,—I will devise some fitting penance at more leisure,” he said, confusedly.

“But, father—my request?”

“Ay, truly—I will renew my warning.—His safety is dear to me too,” he replied in an altered tone. “But meanwhile, do thou continually cherish these recollections—which methinks may stir a woman and a Borgia to more than repay such wrong,—that as one he hath despised thee, as the other seeks to overwhelm thee with eternal infamy!”

“Yes, yes, and I will hate him—hate him as he hates me,” said Lucrezia, sobbing audibly as she once more shrouded her face in her mantle. “Henceforth I will but think of him to execrate my own folly equally with his merciless arrogance—to despise him as he despises me.”

Smiling with austere melancholy, Fra Bruno raised a lamp to escort the lady out, and Alfonso had scarcely time to hide himself among the ruins ere they appeared descending them—the friar anxiously watching every step of his penitent down the steep.

CHAPTER XII.

“Solca nell’ onde, e nell’ arene semina,
E tenta i vaghi venti in rete accogliere,
Chi fonda sue speranze in cor di femmina.”

SANNAZZARO.

He ploughs in the waves, and sows in the sand,
And strives to catch the vagabond winds in nets,
Who founds his hopes in woman’s heart or hand !

THE festival on the following day was diversified with a stupendous bull fight, given by the Orsini in their square of Navona ; and thither the jubilants trooped in masses. The Orsini displayed their magnificence and wealth to a boundless excess in the exhibition of a sport in which the Spanish tastes of Alexander delighted, and in which their heir was famous for his dexterity. The whole square was built up to the first story with seats covered with rich cloths, surmounted by canopies and banners, above which were mostly balconies of the inhabitants, still more superbly decorated. A certain space of the square was railed off for the populace, whose curiosity despised the danger of an inrush from the terrible brutes who were to make the sport—not unfrequently in the manner of Samson diverting the

Philistines. The station prepared for the papal court was of extraordinary splendour—a scaffolding hung with scarlet silk, in the centre of which was a pavilion of the same richly coloured velvet, and lined inside with white satin, flowered all over with gold, and surrounded with network curtains of gold thread to preserve the degree of incognito which Alexander considered due to his double character of priest and sovereign.

Full of gloom and dissatisfaction, and with no thought of taking part in the scene, still the Hospitaller could not hinder himself from joining the throngs that hastened thither, but keeping secluded from observation among the masses of the vulgar who crowded the area. On his arrival he found all the points of view occupied, the pontifical court blazing in all its splendour in its gallery; and within the transparent pavilion Lucrezia, surrounded principally by ladies, sat with the pontiff—laughingly discoursing with a cavalier, who was almost the only one admitted, Sir Reginald le Beaufort! Alfonso inquired, and learned that the English knight had alleged a want of skill in the pastime—and yet he remembered to have seen him bear away great applauses in it, and that there was once nothing he loved better than danger and triumph of any sort!

The arena was strewed deeply with white sand, laid with rose-water, showered from the great fountain as often as the dust began to rise; and it was now covered with groups of horsemen on steeds of fiery mettle, bedizened with the colours of their mistresses and rich embroideries. Among these

Cæsar and the Orsino were easily distinguished,—the former arrayed in black velvet decked with flame-coloured ribands, it was supposed, in honour of the Orsini; the latter in white, Lucrezia's colour, mingled with his own flame-tints and green, the colour of hope and spring. Plumes of corresponding hues set in knots of diamonds; short cloaks, white boots, and gilt spurs, with each a short sword and a quiver of darts at his embroidered girdle, and a light spear in hand—completed the accoutrements of the bull-fighters.

Sixteen cavaliers, including these chieftains, were presented by the marshal of the course before the pavilion of Lucrezia, to request permission to fight the bulls, in honour of herself and the ladies present. Sir Reginald opened the golden net, while Lucrezia and her attendant damoisells smilingly saluted the cavaliers. Alfonso noticed that the Orsino's homage was received with coldness, while Sir Reginald's open visage beamed all over with delight; and unluckily, Paschino, who was among the crowd, called out so as to be heard by all in his neighbourhood—"Ho, ho! yonder net it seems was not wrought by Vulcan, yet it has as pretty a pair within!"

"I give you fair leave, cavaliers, and wish you victory," said Lucrezia, handing a large iron key to the Orsino, and speaking with some hesitation. "But how chances it the Knight of St. John is not among you? Does he fear to lose on bulls the renown he won on buffaloes?—Or reserves his strength to win the prize against us to-morrow?"

"Your grace probably knows better than I—I

take little note of his movements, which are all under clouds and secrecy," replied Paolo, moodily. Lucrezia bent haughtily, and the cavaliers returned to their places. The arena was cleared of all but those who were to engage in the conflict; the assailants took their allotted stations, lances were couched; all was silence and expectation, while Paolo delivered to the marshals the key of the massive byre or stable of unwrought timber, at a part of the square near the palace of the Massimi, in which the bulls were confined. To heighten the interest of the spectacle and the glory of the combatants, four of these ferocious beasts were ordered to be let out at once, although more than one was scarcely ever ventured upon; and renowned as were all the cavaliers for dexterity in the sport, men awaited the entrance of the bulls with a vague feeling of horror, mingling with the absorbing delight of the expectation. So fierce were these creatures known to be that even their keepers, after unlocking the door, and throwing it open, raised the portcullis which still intervened, from above. Then with a dreadful clash of trumpets and kettledrums, a hideous roar as the blaze of day and of the gorgeous scene fell upon their eyes, four prodigious bulls, all coal-black and covered with shaggy hair, rushed forth into the arena. The excitement of the spectacle overcame all Alexander's scruples, and he was now seen himself holding back the golden net, and hanging from his gilded seat with much more of the aspect of the Spanish Cid than of a sovereign priest, exulting in the terrible revel.

It is astonishing how uninterested the Hospitaller continued in the spectacle, amidst the universal uproar of delight and frenzied enthusiasm with which it was watched. He shared not the thundering acclaim which saluted the Orsino, when at the continual hazard of his life, and by displaying a marvellous horsemanship, he wreathed the horns of one of the most furious animals with Lucrezia's colours; when Cæsar, at a single blow, struck off the vast head of a Calabrian bull; when pressing his lance into the stubborn flank of one, his horse reared so high that it stood bolt upright, and he still sat it, laughing at the cries of terror among the ladies, and withdrawing his lance at the very instant when the strength of the bull became irresistible, —vaulted, steed and all, over its deadly rush!

Not satisfied with these displays, both Cæsar and the Orsino afterwards dismounted, and fought on foot, in company with a crowd of humbler combatants, who were exposed to much more danger; and incontestably the two carried off the glory of the day from all their competitors, and so equally that, but that Cæsar gracefully waived his claim in favour of his friend, Paolo, the judges would have been troubled how to have decreed the prize. It was a sword of the richest workmanship, the sheath being wrought in open gold work, with martial arabesques; and with this prize in his hand, nearly exhausted, covered with dust, but with a heart swelling with hope, the Orsino knelt before Lucrezia to present it to her as the lady of his love and chivalry.

The warm commendations of Alexander, who seldom restrained the instant's impulse, added to his satisfaction; and Lucrezia herself received the gift with a more cloudless smile than she often bestowed on her wooer. But with a much more sunny glance at Sir Reginald she extended her white and jewelled hand, and drew the sword which the Orsino held by the scabbard, though with some difficulty, on account of its weight; and the populace, struck by the contrast of her feminine loveliness with the gleam and terror of the weapon which she laughingly attempted to wield, raised an universal shout of joy and interest. It was, perhaps, for the first time on that day that Lucrezia had observed the Hospitaller, at least to his consciousness; but at this moment her eye flashed upon him, and with the utmost gaiety of tone she replied to the Orsino, "To-morrow, with this good blade, will I dub Knights of Love all who are willing to undertake his cause against recusants—chiefly the Knight of St. John. Meanwhile, since 'tis something too heavy an ornament for our proper girdle, and you are spent with the labours of your glory, we give it to the custody and portorage of Sir Reginald le Beaufort."

She offered the hilt as she spoke to the English knight, and Alfonso was convinced that she purposely held it so that his eager grasp partly pressed her hand as he clutched it.

The spectacle concluded with the appearance of four parti-coloured heralds, who with all the grandiloquence and pomp of their craft proclaimed a tour-

nament to be held on the day after the following, in the Colosseum, given by the city of Rome in celebration of the Jubilee, and on occasion of the birthday of his holiness's niece, the most illustrious lady, Donna Lucrezia Borgia. Safety, honour, and fair play to all comers were solemnly pledged; a variety of stipulations declared against magical devices, treachery, or the use of certain prohibited arms; and finally, the prize was declared to be a diamond wreath, bestowed by his holiness, and valued at fifteen thousand Venice ducats of gold, which, according to the general judgment of the ladies, of the Duke of Romagna, judge of the tournament, and of fifteen marshals, heralds, and pursuivants, was to be delivered by the same thrice noble and potent lady to the knight who best deserved it.

Even this magnificent announcement was eclipsed, when immediately after these heralds of the city of Rome had concluded, two in the coat-of-arms of the Duke of Romagna appeared in the square, and in his name invited the whole Roman people, and all the pilgrims who chose to attend, to a feast in his palace and gardens on the Capitol, and to witness a masque of the ancient gods. All who were skilled in the preparation or performance of these entertainments were invited with liberal promises to attend the officers of the duke's household in Santangelo—in especial one Dom Sabbat, of Padua, a learned clerk famously skilled in antiquities, and who was allured with great assurances to assist in the preparations of a triumph which the duke desired to exhibit on re-

ceiving the Gonfalonierate and consecrated rose decreed to him by his holiness, the people, and Senate of Rome.

The papal court then retired into the Massimi palace, to partake of a great banquet prepared by the Orsini; and in a mood of silent bitterness Alfonso returned—but certainly not to take his ease in it—to his inn.

He had spent nearly the whole previous night anxiously reviewing the events of the day, striving to persuade himself, that although some fearful suspicions had cleared themselves from Lucrezia, yet that her guilt in the worst was sufficiently proved. The jealousy of Cæsar, his reproaches and accusations!—the upbraidings of the monk addressed to Lucrezia herself on some dark and terrific crime!—which latter balanced any doubts which the Jewess's legend might raise on Cæsar's insinuations relating to the murder of his unhappy brother:—all these arguments were incessantly repeated by the Hospitaller to meet the thought which haunted him, that he had irrevocably offended Lucrezia. But now he more than ever needed such consolations as they could offer—for the result of his devouring observations at the bull-fight persuaded him that Lucrezia had transferred her licentious liking to one from whom she need apprehend rather a too violent return than a repulse.

With a soul stung all over, or rankling with these poisoned wasps of passion, Alfonso was in a very unsociable mood when, entering his chamber, and despoiling himself of his armour, he heard a tap at the door, which opening at his testy permission admitted

—Fra Bruno. The pale and composed countenance of the Penitentiary yet bore traces of the severest mental agony, which kindled the Hospitaller's contempt and hatred instead of pity, remembering with jealous bitterness the scene he had witnessed, and detesting the unhappy monk even for the ghastly struggle and the superhuman victory he had won. Moreover, he guessed his purpose, and felt his heart still more painfully touched by a proof of Lucrezia's interest in his fate, though at the same time he laboured to persuade himself that it had changed into a desire to remove so dangerous an inquisitor into her misdeeds.

The salutation was sufficiently cold on both sides; and after a very short preface, recalling the obligation under which the knight had laid him, Fra Bruno stated that he felt bound in return to inform him that his life ran hourly risk in Rome, the object of his embassy being suspected, and his ferretings discovered by personages whose vengeance, once provoked, nothing but blood could satisfy; and that therefore he earnestly implored him to make not a moment's delay, but hasten out of Rome and the power of his enemies.

"Fra Bruno, you are a monk, and insensible to human passions," replied Alfonso, with a covert sting. "If not, you could not dream that a soldier and a man, who had pledged himself as I have done to defy the wrath of the idolaters of your Roman Venus in to-morrow's tournament, would basely retire as if in terror from the redemption of his word."

"Therein do I chiefly fear for you," replied Fra

Bruno with a slight flush. "I dread—and not without prompting reasons—that so glaring and public a scorn will exhaust the last drop of patience in the cup of the proud and merciless woman whom you have already, I find, exasperated to that pass at which her anger hath ever been found deadly."

"Proud and merciless!—*deadly*?" repeated Alfonso, adding with a sympathetic consciousness of where his stroke would deal sharpest, "But I trust and believe Dame Venus is at present too much absorbed in love matters with the blooming Knight of England to give immediate attention to the horrors, her more customary pastimes."

Fra Bruno smiled all over his visage, except the lips, and yet mental anguish in its most violent outbreaks never expressed so much of its own essence.

"Be it so, since you will not listen to the charmer, charm he never so wisely!" replied the friar, after a pause. "Pray, then, that you may suffer some great overthrow in the tournament to content the anger of your enemies. But if you meet with some misfortune in the meantime, the blame is not with me; neither can you altogether doubt from what hand it proceeds—and therefore not altogether blame a vengeance which, in truth, your own rashness and violence provoke."

Alfonso made no reply; but after the monk had retired, he dwelt with a continually deepening wrath and pain on the thought that in all probability he only spoke the truth; that Lucrezia now abhorred him; that her momentary liking was changed into the bloodthirsty revenge and hatred natural to a de-

spised woman and a Borgia. Yet, in defiance of the threats held out to him, and to his own extreme fatigue and disgust, Alfonso again formed one of the tumultuous masses of the carnival; retired the latest to his abode; and on the following day was one of the foremost of the prodigious throngs who swarmed up the Quirinal on their way to the Colonna palace—laughing, gibbering, brawling, in all the effervescence of popular delight.

The observations which Alfonso overheard showed how well Cæsar understood the nature of the Roman populace; his praises were on every lip; he knew what was due to the Roman people; he was no Spaniard; it was well the Colonna were banished, since their beautiful gardens were now thrown open to all the world; and scholars declared that it was a feast on the magnificent scale of an ancient Roman emperor, and that the grand days of the Roman people were returning.

Arriving at the gates, the masses poured eagerly in, and found their anticipations more than realized. If nature herself had spread the feast, she could not have been more prodigal than Cæsar's purveyors. The fountains flowed with wines, and kept the marble basins continually full, from which all were at liberty to help themselves; unnumbered tables groaned with the choicest viands; chesnuts and oaks were amazed to find themselves completely hung with clusters of the finest fruits, grapes, melons, oranges, figs; innumerable carvers were busy distributing fragments of oxen and boars, roasted whole, game, and immense pasties.

The eminence on which are the supposed ruins of the Temple of the Sun was appropriated to the most illustrious of the guests, and those who enacted Cæsar's pageant of the ancient mythos. In itself, its elevation rendered it not altogether an unfit Olympus, commanding all the spectacle below, the vast gardens swarming with countless multitudes as if the earth teemed with men like ants, and hemmed in by a wide amphitheatre of palaces, woods, vineyards, and illustrious ruins, half lost in the golden haze of noonday. The whole height was canopied with silk so palely blue that it could scarcely be distinguished from the heaven above; surrounded by couches whose voluptuous colours and softness well imitated the clouds on which the divinities of Homer were wont to solace themselves; and thronged with illustrious guests at a banquet which the gods might have left their nectar and ambrosia to share. Ascending to the scene in mingled defiance and curiosity, Alfonso himself stood amazed, among a mass of privileged gazers, at the more than Assyrian magnificence of the spectacle.

Alexander was the only personage present who appeared in his usual costume; but his majestic aspect, and robes, qualified him without any mythological insignia to represent the Father of the Gods. Cæsar enacted a Mercury, which his gay and yet astute countenance, brilliant, but licentious and cynical wit, admirably suited. By some it was thought that he had assumed this character because that Mercury was the messenger and instrument of his sire; by others in relation to the peace-making qualities of the god;

and a sarcastic allusion was supposed to be couched in the twining serpents of his caduceus.

But Alfonso noticed little else after his eye had once fallen on Lucrezia—who enacted the part which all would have assigned her, but which, considering the attributes of the goddess and those assigned to herself, it looked like defiance of opinion to assume—that of the Queen of Love. She wore the skyey purple robe, starry with diamonds, which the ancients ascribed to Venus, clasped by a girdle of pure gold, to which hung the silver looking-glass—and with the golden sandals and crown of roses, the fresh bloom of her complexion, the warm perfume breathing round her; the laughter and triumph which sparkled in her eyes; the grace of her gestures; the winning sweetness of her voice,—united every attribute of the all-subduing celestial.

Beside her sat Signor Paolo, in passion and doting admiration, at least supporting the character of the warrior lover of Venus; while the Duke of Urbino performed that of the jealous and deformed husband with the skill of a comic actor of great ability. But Alfonso was more troubled to observe that Le Beaufort performed the part of an Adonis at the laughing suggestion of Guidobaldo, eagerly adopted by the young barbarian when he heard the tale attached—and he looked the robustly beautiful hunter to admiration. And strangely well did Lucrezia enact her part of tenderness towards him; and indignation took possession of Alfonso's soul when he marked the bewildering effect of this coquetry on Le Beaufort. Cruel to the last degree, he *hoped* it was, and thought that it was a

still greater proof of her diabolical nature, if it was not.

Cæsar had made no exceptions in his invitations—Vitellozzo figured as a Hercules, at no great distance from the Momus of Messer Niccolò. Bembo was there as an Orpheus, lyre in hand, and perhaps sonnet in petto; and an Alecto, who never laid aside her black mask, and well supported her mournful character, faced him with her knotted snakes fearfully stiffened out around her head.

Himself apparently unnoticed, Alfonso gazed with a burning heart on the spectacle; remarking that Lucrezia's gaiety was so extreme that at times it bordered on wildness. Glistening pages, golden vases, banners, flowers, the splendid canopy overhead which within was lined with gold rays spreading from the centre; the festal splendour of the gardens below; the moving masses of the rejoicing populace; their dances and revelries; the glorious landscape around; the wit, the laughter, the music, floated all indistinctly through his waking dream. Something he afterwards remembered of the Orsino's gaze fixed on him once with fierce scrutiny; some of the gibes of Machiavelli which moved incessant laughter, afterwards recurred to him; but all confusedly—waifs of dreams. The banquet, long as it was, seemed to him to pass in a moment; and when the revellers arose—although the project had been for some time discussed among them,—he had only a strange vacant idea that they meant to go to a part of the gardens which overlooked the Corso to witness some kind of a race; but suddenly, when he found himself

left almost alone on the eminence, he remembered that it was to be a foot-race of the Jews !

The remembrance of Miriam came back with the word upon him. If the Jews were to run a race the Ghetto would be open ; and if so, he might bring her forth to proclaim—what ? He knew not. Something vaguely he thought of convincing himself that there was, no room to doubt Lucrezia's guilt—to prove that Miriam's Francesco was not the Duke of Gandia—to overwhelm the whole Borgian race with doubt and terror—to satisfy himself by Alexander's conduct that he feared the detection of the murderer of his son !

Hastening down the acclivity, his eye caught the remote glitter of the court winding up to a marble terrace which overlooked the Corso, amidst the exulting acclamations of the well-feasted multitude. And looking after it with great intentness, he almost stumbled over the Alecto, whom he had noticed at the banquet, who was seated on a broken column belonging to the ancient temple whose ruins were around, with her mask off, as if to inhale the air more freely. In the momentary glimpse which he caught ere she could replace it, Alfonso saw a countenance which amply answered in its sculpturesque beauty and gloom the fury its owner personated.

“ Divinity of Tartarus ! may I pass without the offence you know so well how to avenge ? ” said Alfonso, for he felt that he could scarcely go on without some notice in common courtesy.

“ If that be Greek for hell—in Italian it is memory ! ” returned Alecto, with intense and seem-

ingly irrepressible bitterness. "Pardon me, signor!—but I should know. Let me not hinder you—doubtless as eager a worshipper as all the rest of mankind of yonder beautiful lady—most beautiful!—I dreamed not she was so beautiful!"

"There is something in your tone, lady,—nay, I am certain that the fair fury of to-day was the Fata Morgana of yesterday?" said Alfonso, suddenly struck with her voice.

"I have heard too that you mistook a dancing-girl for the lady of the Borgias," replied the lady, turning rapidly away. "But this I can truly assure you, knight,—whatever I was yesterday, or am to-day, a Borgia made me—even to the ruin around us!"

Leaving the Hospitaller to ponder this intelligence or enigma, the fury hastily disappeared, and he resumed his way.

In the Corso, Alfonso met the Jews who were to run the race, stripped nearly naked, their frames glistening with oil, and eager as gladiators, for the prize was exemption from a year's imposts and fines. Allowing them and their rabble to pass, Alfonso continued his route until he arrived in the Piazza Giudea, a square flanked on one side by the Ghetto. But here he encountered another and much more numerous crowd, the central figure of which caught his immediate notice.

Mounted astraddle on an ass, which was led by two sbirri of the city guard, her feet tied under it, and face turned to the tail, came a female figure, in a showy Jewish costume, whom Alfonso almost

instantly recognized as Miriam. Some hallucination doubtless possessed her, for although the people kept up a continual sullen roar of derision and anger around her, her features were elate with joy and triumph, as if she were the chief personage of a fine procession.

The Hospitaller made his way through all the throng to the sbirri, and with much agitation inquired what they were going to do with their prisoner, and what she had done to deserve to be so.

"It is a Jewish harlot, signor, who managed to steal out with the runners, despite all orders to the contrary; and we are leading her for punishment before the Conservatorio," replied one of the axemen.

"Cut her to pieces!—the Jewish harlot that brings the plague among us!" yelled a woman whose own designation probably needed but to be changed in the epithet.

Two stout ruffians, seemingly retainers of some great house, drew their daggers, shouting "Death, death!" and such a gibbering tumult arose that for some minutes it was scarcely possible to distinguish a word that was said, the ass braying in concert.

"Peace, peace!" said the knight, waving his sheathed sword disdainfully to the rabble. "Valiant sbirri! mark you not that the poor girl is mad?—Leave her to my care, and I will see her restored to her home, without offence to any good Christian."

An universal laugh, and shouts of "Shame, shame!" showed in what light the populace took

this proposal. But turning at the sound of his voice on her uneasy elevation, Miriam appeared to recognise him, for she clapped her hands in delight. "'Tis he!—'tis the dark cedar!" she exclaimed, rejoicingly. "I have kept my word, thou seest!—Lead me to him!—Where is Francesco?—For were I ten times a queen, I will be but his servant and loving slave!"

"Shame!—so likely a man to take such a part!" resumed the woman who had spoken. "But they make philtres and love-draughts in the Ghetto, and the poor handsome young man is bewitched."

"Death to the witch!" again resounded on all sides.

"Patience, my brothers!—whoever approaches within my sword's length shall taste its edge!" said the Hospitaller. "I tell ye again, the young girl is mad; but to content ye, I will obtain her dismissal before some competent presence."

The awe which the power and tyranny of the nobles and military diffused befriended the knight on this occasion. Murmurs indeed arose, and indistinct expressions of anger or disapproval, but no one offered any serious obstruction when the knight cut the thongs which fastened the Jewess's feet, made her turn to a more decent and feminine attitude, and led the ass on by the halter, desiring the sbirri to keep on each side, himself watchfully observing the mob with a hand on his sword.

The intention which the adventurous Knight of St. John had formed was to lead the Jewess direct to the

presence of the pontiff, and under pretext of craving justice on her behalf, ascertain if she recognised Cæsar, at the risk of whatever consequences might ensue.

But Miriam herself seemed likely to baffle his purpose. Far from any notion of detecting the murderer of her lover, she was possessed with a notion that she was being escorted with all possible honours to his palace and arms—reminiscences, probably, of some fair promises which love had lavished. Her satisfaction was so complete that it seemed a cruelty to attempt to break the illusion on which it was founded. Every object in turn attracted her delighted notice: she patted the ass, and kissed her hands at the mob incessantly, acknowledging their civility in accompanying her, but which they took to be a mockery of their baffled fury. The whispers in which the Hospitaller endeavoured to recall her wandering mind, necessarily close and earnest, also heightened their suspicions and indignation to the highest degree.

But in vain did the knight labour to dissolve the hallucination which possessed her: every stately building which they approached she concluded to be the palace of her unknown lover, and she stared with amazement when they passed without beholding him; the glittering confusion of the Corso was a festive pomp prepared for her reception, and the splendid groups of the papal court which appeared in the distance on a terrace overlooking it, convinced her that they were at length approaching her lover's presence.

"How may that be, Miriam?" at length exclaimed the knight. "Hast thou not told me thy lover is dead—slain by assassins in the Ghetto?"

"It was a dream—a dream! I had often fearful dreams, for I knew my people would have slain him and stoned me if they had seen his shadow!" she replied, impatiently. "But we shall easily know him: look, here are the flowers he is like—how withered they are!" she added, glancing at a nosegay in her breast. "Daffodils for his fair brow—pinks for his cheeks—musk for his breath—there was nothing red enough for his lips—but here's peach-blossom too for his cheeks—and blue starwort for his eyes."

Reduced to despair by finding that no appeal to the realities of the scene could restore her to consciousness, Alfonso was scarcely sorry to observe that as they approached the terrace, and were descried from it, an officer who commanded the guards ranged before it received some order, and rode towards them, shouting in a harsh and imperative tone, "Halt, all!" Alfonso immediately obeyed, and the populace paused too, but raising a tempest of cries, explanations, and demands of vengeance which drowned every distinct sound.

"What the foul fiend is this, scum?" said the horseman, still advancing, "that ye break into our lord his holiness's diversions with your rude clamour? Is it a cut-purse, or—what have we here?"

The commander's vizor was raised, and Alfonso perceived that his sallow complexion grew nearly

bloodless as he looked at the young Jewess. But before he could make any reply Miriam uttered a joyful cry of recognition, and exclaimed, "Take me to him!—take me to him! Sir Black Knight, you may leave me now in a blessed hour, for here is the stranger who came with the tidings of my Francesco. Son of a fortunate father! lead me to him, and thou shalt have gold, and spices, and frankincense, more than thy son's son can use!"

"What is this?" stammered the rider, staring with mingled terror and amazement around. A hundred voices began to reply; but that of the Hospitaller quickly overpowered even the numerous rivalry.

"Señor Don Migueloto," he said, "this girl is mad, but not so mad but that it is to be discerned she hath suffered a grievous wrong, either from her own people, or some monstrous villains of ours; and I have promised to lead her before our lord to demand justice."

"I am not mad!—Art thou not come, good Christian, to lead me to my lord?" said Miriam, angrily, and looking with the eagerness of hope at the grim and fear-struck visage of the captain of Santangelo.

"Thou—she—Francesco!—how came this Jewish woman here?" he exclaimed at last.

"She stole forth with the runners—let us trust, not to meet her paramour, and to the shame of the holy cross this knight, who is a priest of St. John?" said the deep, melancholy, but now somewhat derisive voice of Fra Bruno, who, enveloped in his cowl had mingled in the throng.

Migueloto took the hint, and wrinkling his brow terrifically, he turned to one of the sbirri, and demanded his account of the matter.

“Truly, my lord, we discovered the wench straying out of bounds, and the knight and she seemed well acquainted when they met, insomuch that he rushed against all odds to the rescue.”

The unanimous reiteration of the mob confirmed this view of the transaction, and Migueloto’s countenance gradually recovered some tints of life.

“It is death for any Jewish woman to leave the Ghetto during the Jubilee, more especially one of this wench’s trade, and like enough to bring down a heavy judgment on us all,” he said. “Go thy ways in peace, cavalier, and leave the harlot to the punishment that befits her offence. Honest men, whip her back to the Ghetto; but give her fair way, that she may make the best of her courser’s speed.”

This proposition was received with universal applause, many reserving to themselves the power of extending its provisions, while Miriam looked at the sentencer in vacant surprise and alarm.

“Sir Castellain, this shall not be—at least until his Holiness has heard her complaint,” said Alfonso, with difficulty bridling his wrath. “Some foul play hath been wrought against her—some Christian lover slain in her presence—she shall have justice!”

“’Tis false!—it chanches that I know the truth of the matter—she is forth to poison men’s ears with calumnies of the Jew dogs, her kinsfolk,” said Migueloto, fiercely. “It shames such a saint as you

would have men think you—ay, and women too!—to be stirring in such a cause; but since she is your paramour, I tell you, knight, the only means to show your kindness now is to drive her ass at a good speed, for until she reaches the Ghetto I give every man lawful leave to wreak his scorn on her!”

“I appeal to the pontiff himself!” shouted Don Alfonso, and so loudly that his voice probably reached the terrace. “Bar not my way, for I will make it through an army rather than suffer your bloodthirsty malice to prevail.”

“What malice have I against the wench?” returned Migueloto, his complexion resuming its leaden tints beneath the eye of the Hospitaller. “Woman! hast thou ever seen me before, or I thee, that I should owe thee malice?”

The castellan had certainly not noticed the strange and varying expression of Miriam’s countenance as he spoke; but when he turned and looked at her with his fierce protruding eyes, she uttered a shriek which rang over the whole Corso, and clapping her hands, and hissing as if to frighten away some direful animal, she shouted—“Murderer!” till the very sky seemed to echo with the crimson word.

“Upon her! hack her to pieces! It is the law—I will see it justified! Harm not the madman, but death to the Jewess!” yelled Migueloto, pressing his horse towards her; but stepping between him and his intended victim, the knight drew his sword, and waving it round him soon cleared a circle to some distance. But recovering from their panic,

and encouraging one another with a loud shout of fury, the populace drew their daggers, and were certainly meditating an onset which all his courage could scarcely have withstood—when Master John of Strasburgh, accompanied by half a dozen halberdiers, appeared to command peace in his holiness's name, and with order to bring all the parties in the disturbance before him.

Alfonso most willingly obeyed, and Migueloto seemed afraid to offer any further opposition; so that lifting Miriam from the ass, half carrying half dragging her, he made his way to the terrace through the now unresisting masses.

CHAPTER XIII.

“O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glories of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away!”

SHAKSPERE.

“REMEMBER all thy story—thy Francesco’s murder—and demand justice at the feet of the venerable judge before whom I will place thee,” said Alfonso, as they mounted the terrace; and Miriam, whose recollections were now rekindled in all their violence, shrieked “Justice, justice!” with frenzied eagerness at every step of their advance.

A moment before, the attention of the court and populace was absorbed in the victor of the race—who had fallen insensible with exhaustion as he reached the goal. Now all eyes and all curiosity was turned towards the strange spectacle of the Knight of St. John and the Jewess, bedizened in her tattered and disordered array. .

Alexander was the only personage on the terrace who was seated, Cæsar standing by his chair on one hand, Lucrezia on the other, the court forming a glittering half moon behind. The masks, laid aside

at the banquet, were now all resumed ; a circumstance rather favourable to the Hospitaller's intents, for a too sudden recognition of the murderer might prevent the hearing of the tale, and Miriam would seem only to rave.

Innumerable were the exclamations of astonishment and incredulity when the Hospitaller was clearly recognised, as he led the Jewess up the steps of the terrace. Alexander himself looked at the pair with amazement, and when Miriam prostrated herself with oriental homage at his feet, he exclaimed to the knight—"What fluttering jay is this ?—a Hebrew convertite ?"

"Holy father, you are to know that this is the Jewish girl whom I rescued from ruffians in the Ghetto, as your paternity may have heard it related ; and whom I now bring to your feet to demand justice for a much more horrible fact," said the knight, notwithstanding a throb even of his stout heart when he beheld the glance which Cæsar turned on the suppliant.

"What fact ?—of what speak you ? This is neither the time nor place ; his holiness's justicers are men of approved integrity !" said Cæsar ; and at the sound of his voice Miriam's whole frame trembled, and clasping her hands on her forehead, she glared fixedly up at the masked speaker.

"Formal justice is too slow ! Three years have elapsed since the deed of which we demand redress was perpetrated," replied the knightly advocate.

"Knight of St. John ! 'tis more than rumoured

that you are in Rome to gather matter of accusation and aspersion against the holy see," began Cæsar, when the pontiff interrupted him.

"Three years!—truly, it is as great an injustice to delay justice as to refuse it. We will hear and adjudge the matter if it be within an hour's compass, which we doubt not," said Alexander.

"But if it be some intricate matter of law, as it must be since your learned administrators have hesitated so long!" said Cæsar, when the pontiff again cut him short.

"Even so—ourselves served a full apprenticeship to the law," he said; "and during that time we observed what shall now persuade us that there is no nut in justice so hard to crack that lawyers must keep it turning in their mouths till the kernel is musty. Speak on, daughter of the tribes! we will hear thee—but be not too womanly in your discourse—that is, too long."

"But, holy father, if her argument runs against a Christian, she is a Jewess, and her evidence cannot be entertained," said Cæsar.

"If that be the law in Rome, from this moment we abolish it!" returned Alexander, with his usual vehemence. "But in what doth the spur gall you, nephew? Is the complaint against any ruffian whose lord supports instead of punishing his crime, as even too many of ye do?"

"Holy father, our plaint is of a murder committed three years are gone—a secret, foul, and most treacherous murder—when the Duke of Romagna was a gentle cardinal—and therefore 'tis not like to

attach to any of his religious following," said the Hospitaller.

"Three years ago?" said Alexander, with a darkening shade of memory passing over his broad forehead. "Secret, foul, and treacherous! Listen, sirs, with the end that all of ye may spare supplication, and none conceive the denial special to himself—I swear by the ashes of holy Peter that I will see justice done on this criminal, whoever he be, or ere I sleep to-night, were he as near and dear to me as our nephew here."

"This much I have gathered, then, holy father," said Alfonso. "This hapless girl had a Christian lover, whose quality and name were unknown to her, but who called himself Francesco; and who, from her confused report, must needs have been a noble of high rank."

"Tut!" interrupted Cæsar. "Is it the old story over again of the Christian paramour that was killed and pickled by the Jews for pork?"

"Francesco!—but go on, go on!" exclaimed the pontiff, very hurriedly.

"The story hath then reached your highness's hearing?" said Alfonso, concealing with difficulty the agitation which worked within him.

"Among many others which, since our dear and hapless brother met his mysterious doom, we eagerly clutch at, in the vain hope of obtaining some clue to vengeance," replied Cæsar, calmly. "But this story we found had no other foundation than the ravings of a mad Jew girl, whose relatives declared that she had never stirred out of the Ghetto during all her life."

"This mad Jew girl is now at your feet, most holy father; and for the sake of a dearer Francesco I implore you to hear what she can relate of the barbarous murder of her own!" said Alfonso. "Something she will speak it disorderedly, as one whose mind is shattered by the blow of the direst calamity—yet not so wholly unpieced but that skilled eyes may join the parts."

"We will hear her," said Alexander, in a troubled and yet eager tone, a dark cloud gathering over his temples. "Arise, daughter, and speak as to a kind and pitying father. When and how perished your lover—your Francesco? By whose hand? If thy people slew him I will protect thee against their anger, and avenge thee so that—even to thy heart's content.'

Miriam had continued kneeling during the whole dialogue, which perhaps she scarcely heard, so intently wrapt was she in considering Cæsar's person and habiliments. So lost was she in this scrutiny that she started when Alfonso gently plucked her girdle to recall her attention.

"Now, Miriam, speak!—Who was it bade thee summon thy Francesco—to baffle an appointment with some fair Christian dame?" exclaimed Alfonso.

"Where is he?—Oh, he is gone," she said, looking timidly round, and glancing over the whole multitude, whence, indeed, Migueloto had disappeared. "I never liked his black-bead eyes—and so I told Francesco; but he was so brave, and loved me so—he would needs stay! And so the moon was shining, and he was fast asleep—and first they ticked at the

door—and I would not believe I heard any sound lest it should be the witches! But he came—he came!—The proud Christian woman with her diamond eyes could not win him from his poor Jewess—yet I saw them smiling together at the tournament when he kissed his hand at me,—poor fool! for it frightened me that the Christian marked me! But then he was so beautiful—where are my flowers?—This was his colour, my lord—nay, I thought I had a white rose too!—But it makes no matter; I can blow this open till you see the white at the bottom, and that will serve for his brow.”

And she began breathing one of her roses open with the gentlest puffs, and yet with great anxiety to display the pallid tints in its depths.

“How long are we to listen to this pretty madness?” said Cæsar, casting himself into a careless and inattentive attitude.

“And was thy Francesco fair—very fair?” exclaimed Alexander, who to the contrary grew evidently agitated, and, to the grief of Burciardo, not only permitting the profane hands of the Jewess to cling to his knees, but bending over her so anxiously that his mitre touched the folds of her Jewish head-dress.

“The moonshine on his face that night was no fairer!” said the Jewess, with a heavy sigh, and again looking with crouching and fascinated eyes at Cæsar.

“His hair!—what colour was his hair?” continued the pontiff.

“Brighter than these gold zequins, though I wear

them for a remembrance," replied the Jewess; and heaving a deep sigh, or rather groan, Alexander threw himself back in his chair.

"And now, Miriam, remember! repeat the tale you told me of his murder!—remember how they tore him from your arms—your cries—their stabs—his long hair drenched in blood—and how they dragged the body away!" exclaimed Alfonso.

Uttering a wild shriek as the words struck on all the jarring strings of her memory, Miriam embraced the pontiff's knees in oriental supplication, and poured forth the dreadful revelation with such passionate vehemence, that, wild and broken as it was, the scene became almost visual in the painting of her frenzied imagination.

Alfonso kept his eyes fixed on the pontiff, and he observed that his powerful frame trembled all over with agitation; and his anxiety to hear the tale was so apparent—his emotion so great—that the knight could scarcely doubt that he suspected the murdered cavalier was his unfortunate son.

"The murderers were—masked!—wore the Christian dress! Oh, could I but think—the whole Ghetto, man, woman, and child, were all too few!" he gasped, when the Jewess broke off with frantic shrieks for justice. "Tell me truly—on thy life, tell me!—know you nought of this unhappy youth but that his name was Francesco?"

Miriam shook her head mournfully.

"Your paternity is listening to a mad woman!" said Cæsar, in a perfectly composed voice. "I did not think to bring so sad a recollection back to your

holiness ; but you must learn that when formerly I questioned this matter, her grandames told me that the amazing tidings of our dear brother's doom—the proclamation of his beautiful person to guide discovery—worked on this mad wench's brain even to believe the tale we hear—but wherewith while I live no man shall slander the memory of my brother, imputing to him a crime forbidden both in Heaven and on earth !”

“ And yet—I will be free to tell your highness—that it was with some hope to throw light on that mournful business which gave me daring to bring it before his holiness,” replied the Hospitaller, sternly.

“ We are infinitely beholden to you, Knight of St. John!—but all this is a stale legend,” said Cæsar, continuing, in a mild and compassionate tone to the Jewess—“ Alack, poor wench, thou dost not know that 'tis our Christian wont to throw away the flower when we have withered it with our evil breath. Art thou well assured thy Francesco did not abandon thee when thou hadst, as women think, given him even too much cause for faith ?”

“ Where is he, then?—lead me to him!—let me but see him, and then he cannot be so cruel!” exclaimed poor Miriam, frantically. “ Do this, and I will give thee more gems than hang on a rose-bush at dawn.”

“ Your holiness hears !—but while we listen to the mad reverie, we forget that the world is listening too !” said Cæsar.

“ And if some such crime has been committed—unless the Jews can disprove it—they can well afford

to pay ten thousand gold crowns as a fine," said the Datary, gliding up to the pontiff's chair, and bending over to his ear.

"A fine!—ten thousand gold crowns!—Sell his blood for gold!—I will have them all put to the rack—to tortures infinite—till they confess who did it!" groaned Alexander in a harsh undertone, as if the words were drawn gratingly over his heart.

"On a mad woman's legend, holy father!—where were then your justice?" said Cæsar, very calmly. "But even as your wisdom pleases—the Jews are no clients of mine!—only your paternity may remember the wench says her murderers wore the Christian garb. She hath not wit enough to turn the blame that way, or there's deeper instruction in it!" And he glanced malignantly at the Hospitaller.

"Miriam! were all the murderers of Francesco masked? or fell not the mask from the visage of the chief one in the struggle? For so she told me, illustrious signor," said Alfonso, with an ample return of the look; and then indeed Cæsar did slightly start.

"Is this true, Jewess?—speak, my daughter!—Didst thou behold the worse than devilish visage of one of the murderers?" said Alexander, with a wildness which contrasted strongly with his usual Spanish dignity and calm.

"One!—yes, the scarlet one!" said Miriam, with an insane breathless rapidity, as if she, too, comprehended that they were on the verge of a discovery.

"Let your holiness command all present to un-

mask, and we shall see if she recognises any one here ! ” said Alfonso.

“ The farce grows somewhat dangerous,” replied Cæsar, hastily. “ Her madness is as like to hit on one as another, and thus darken some innocent person in our sunshine for ever. Nay, she is like enough to mark me, for look how she gazes at me, and speaks of scarlet because I wear it ! ”

“ It were indeed too hazardous,” said Lucrezia, for the first time speaking, in a low, horror-struck voice.

“ Yea ! and to prove what fearful fallacy were in the assay—I dare be sworn, for that our sister is by some held fair, if she unmask, this Hebrew shall avouch that she was the rival from whose arms she lured Francesco that night ! ” returned the duke, laughing scornfully.

“ Nay, then, unhappy Hebrew, look on me ! Am I thy rival ? ” said Lucrezia, rapidly clutching the mask from her beautiful and tear-bathed face.

Miriam started—tossed back her long black hair—and gazed at her with eyebrows rising like the back of a hyena, so fearful was the expression.

“ Yes, yes, it was thou, murtheress !—it was thou who had him murdered for loving me much better !—it was thou, it was thou ! Seize her, most venerable judge !—she murdered him—they told me so—for winning her Francesco ! ” shrieked Miriam, starting up, and but that the Hospitaller interposed, she would have rushed upon Lucrezia. “ Now I remember, now I remember—the Scarlet Man told

me they slew him by that proud murtheress's command, whom he deserted for me! Seize her!—seize her!”

“She is mad indeed—and we have listened too long to these ravings!” said Alexander; but Alfonso noticed that his eye fell and dwelt with a moment's devouring suspicion on the aghast countenance of Lucrezia—and his own heart seemed grasped by a hand of ice.

At this moment a noise and movement in the crowd attracted the attention, though but dreamily, of the awed and panic-struck courtiers, who hardly dared to look in each other's faces lest their eyes should betray their thoughts. Two haggard old women appeared, struggling, screaming, and pushing their way through the mob, who buffeted them, plucked their long gray hair, and yelled—“The witches of the Ghetto!” while they made the air ring with cries of “Miriam, Miriam!—mercy on our child! she is mad, mad, mad!”

“Some kindred of the Jewess come to rescue their wandering idiot,” said Cæsar, laughing outright with the wildness of overcharged feelings. “Notte and Morta in very troth! Here is your lost lamb, shepherdesses of the devil! Guards, rescue them from Christian buffeters, and bring them hither.”

This order was given but in time to save the two old women from some violent marks of the popular hatred. As it was, they were dragged on the terrace from the mob with difficulty, and presented the wild and haggard appearance of two owls torn by hawks

from their holes into daylight. The instant Miriam saw them she cowered down like a hare when the hounds are upon it.

“What forms are these?—of earth or hell?” said Alexander, as the hags prostrated themselves at his footstool.

“Of neither, please you, but of the Ghetto,” replied Cæsar, hastening to encourage his allies. “Speak without fear, good grandames, and tell us what ails this wench; that she tells tales of murder and bloodshed as if it were the trade your family worked at?”

“Signor, we are two miserably poor, old, deformed, deserted, friendless women of the seed of Jacob, that live by honest midwifery, and some small skill in herbs inherited from our father, a wise physician,” said Morta, raising herself with her hands in a ghastly attitude of supplication. “This is our father’s son’s son’s daughter, and she is mad for the love of a Christian, who taught her sin, and left her repentance; deserting her as soon as the fruits of her guilt became manifest, whence she fell into a madness; and taking occasion from the name of the most noble lord, Duke Francesco, when his murder and the reward was proclaimed in the tents of our sojourning place,—waking one night from a fearful dream,—she would have it that it was her own base abandoner, and upbraided us poor, weak, miserable, aged, hopeless women, with his death.”

“Ancient women! name to me the seducer, and all the kings of the earth kneeling at our footstool

shall not obtain his pardon from us!" exclaimed Alexander.

"Master and sovereign! he concealed all but the name—Francesco—even from his wretched leman, dreading the justice of your laws," replied Notte, with a smile which gleamed on her visage like phosphor on a skull.

"The punishment is death—your infallibility deems his crime deserved it?" said Cæsar, with extreme eagerness.

"Dismiss them—I am not well!" said the pontiff, gasping heavily for breath.

"Remove your unhappy child, good ancestresses," said Cæsar. "Methinks, crazy as this wench is, she is too fairly moulded to keep much more of such holy company without scandal—yet though unsuccessful, his holiness cannot but be grateful, sir Hospitaller, for the zeal you show in gratifying the great wish of all our hearts."

Notte and Morta sprang forward on their passive but trembling descendant, whose eyes, for the first time amidst the terrors of the day, expressed abject and physical fear. But Alfonso, although he felt that Lucrezia gazed at him with intense anxiety, and knew the motives which were ascribed to him,—raised her, and informed the hags that he would aid in escorting her back to the Ghetto, in a tone which a nod from Cæsar informed them they were not to dispute. Accordingly the whole group retired from the pontiff's presence, the Hospitaller carefully supporting the staggering steps

of the Jewess, amidst general signs of wonder and disapprobation.

Still it might have been difficult for the Jewesses to pass through the enraged and muttering masses, if Fra Bruno had not joined the Hospitaller as he descended, and commanded the throngs to make way with his usual austerity and sway. With this assistance they gradually got clear of the Corso; but Miriam's memory seemed once more vacant of all its images, and she abandoned the Hospitaller's support, gambolling and singing before him, to the great scandal of those who continued to stare after them. The old crones spoke not a word, although they continued to glower vindictively at their escorts, until they reached the gates of the Ghetto, when they muttered a profusion of thanks and blessings pronounced much in the manner of curses, and seemed to decline any farther attendance. Fearing, in fact, that more interference would only exasperate her kindred against poor Miriam, Alfonso admonished them to forgive this strange vagary of her disease, which had also imposed on himself, and complied with their tacit desire.

Fra Bruno accompanied him as he retired, and as soon as the gates of the Ghetto had closed on the Jewesses, abruptly renewed his advice to the Hospitaller to quit Rome immediately.

"I know of nought which hath occurred to change my resolve before announced to you," replied Alfonso, impatiently. "To the contrary, in the earnestness of the pontiff to detect the murderers of his

son—after what has passed between us, father, you will understand me.”

“Yea!—but you have hovered on the verge of a more direful secret. Be wise in time; women provoked to extremity are more relentless than men, as water petrified is harder than natural stone,” replied the Penitentiary, with an innuendo which, coupled with Miriam’s accusations, produced a powerful effect on Alfonso.

“I will but tarry to rebuke the pride of yonder malapert English boy, who imagines that no Italian can resist him and his tricks of lance,” he replied; but in the same flash of thought, remembering Miriam’s recognition of Migueloto—her allusions to the Scarlet Man—the boatman’s story—and the reasons he had to distrust the Dominican, his smothered passions boiled up into rage against the latter. “And then, friar,” he continued, with a glance which obviously startled the confessor, “*Then*—I will leave the field, though it be of lilies and roses, clear to *ye all*.”

“Clear—to us all!” exclaimed Fra Bruno, starting, almost insanely, at the knight.

“Else wherefore did a certain great man attempt your life?” returned the Hospitaller. “If you would not have me explain myself farther, trouble me with no more of your importunities; for, saint as you are, I doubt not the people would be amazed to hear all that might be related of your long interview in the hermitage on the Aventine—when thunder only—the thunder of a brick pressed out of its place by one who was determined to be convinced of your

innocence,—prevented you from at least attempted guilt !”

Fra Bruno’s aspect, as these words were uttered, was so terrific in its agony of shame, remorse, fear, doubt, and wrath, that Alfonso himself was troubled at beholding it.

“ Rest content—I will not betray you ; but dare not to betray me, since thou seest what I can return upon thee !” he said, hurrying away ; but looking back once at a considerable distance, he perceived Fra Bruno still standing, rooted to the spot ; and somewhat repenting his own inconsiderate fury, he continued his route.

CHAPTER XIV.

LA GIOSTRA FURIOSA.

“ Oh, holy St. George ! O very champion !
O undefyled and most holy Knight !
O gemme of chivalry ! O very emeraud stone !
O loadstar of loyalty ! O diamond most qwyght !
O saphir of sadness ! O ruby of most right !
O very carbuncle ! O thou mantese of Ynde !
Graunte me thy helpe—thy comfort for to fynde ! ”

Old lines, quoted in Dugdale's Baronage.

THE day of the tournament—the festival most anxiously expected by the warlike pilgrims of all those which the magnificence of the Borgias provided or promised—dawned with congenial splendour. The ceremonies of the day commenced with the exhibition of a Roman triumph, in which Cæsar went to the Capitol to receive the investiture of the Gonfalonierate, habited like the first who made the name glorious and ominous for ever. Alfonso was among the gazers, curious to witness with what degree of firmness the duke would assume the insignia of his

slaughtered brother ; and he quailed not once. He refused, indeed, to assume the robes of the office, and went bare-headed through the ceremonial, as a mark of his respect to the senate and Roman people—two fictions which were supposed to have conferred the honour—until a woman, who represented Destiny, no less in her stern beauty than in her array, who came whence no one knew, nor by whose command, descended from the tower of the Capitol, and crowned him with a wreath of laurels, at the same time pronouncing a gorgeous prophecy of his future achievements, in which she did not scruple to promise the restoration of the ancient Roman grandeur in his own, as emperor of a people who required only such a leader to become once more all that they had been ! The enthusiasm of the populace was visibly kindled by these splendid promises, but Cæsar replied only with a smiling and modest abnegation ; and the pomp concluded by the senators, magistrates, and all the orders of the city conducting him to receive the confirmation of his dignity in the Vatican.

Alfonso immediately remembered the features of the Destiny to be those of the lady to whom he had spoken in the Colonna gardens, and of the Fairy Morgana ; and now, concluding that she was some instrument of Cæsar's, the Prince of Ferrara was alarmed at the proclamation of an ambition so boundless ; for doubtless, beneath this seemingly unconcerted adulation his real hopes and intentions were insinuated. His regrets at the impossibilities to which he had himself added of an alliance with the power most capable of curbing these dangerous designs,

served now only to increase the desire which possessed him of giving the death-blow to all hope by putting the crown on his offences to Lucrezia, and winning from her champions the triumph she coveted in the tournament. A burning jealousy of Le Beaufort, who alone he believed likely to wrest the victory from him, heightened the feeling to a kind of frenzy.

He returned to his inn to arm himself, and partake of some needful refreshment; for which latter purpose his host produced some fruits and wines of finer quality than any the Hospitaller had yet tasted in his abode. He therefore ate and drank more heartily than was his wont—perhaps to strengthen the resolution which was continually melting in his heart. When he had done, and was commending the viands, while the host assisted his squires to arm him, the good man, who was pleased with the manners and liberality of his guest, could not forbear telling him, under great injunctions of secrecy, that the repast was sent to be served to him by some lady—who it was he knew not, but the Hospitaller could probably guess, and so the man-at-arms who brought it had averred.

At first Alfonso was almost vanquished by this last proof of the generosity and tenderness of Lucrezia; and his enamoured fancy dwelt with delight on renewed hopes—but gradually he began to feel a species of languor and inertness creeping over his whole frame, and slight convulsive trembles shook his joints which he had great difficulty in concealing from those who armed him. It was long, however, before the direful thought occurred to him, which finally—when his squires had retired to prepare his

steed, and, the excitement of their presence gone, he felt an almost invincible necessity of yielding to sleep, —rushed upon him that he was poisoned !

Poisoned, and by Lucrezia !—when these two thoughts conjoined first sprang upon his soul, for some moments its reasoning faculties deserted him. He tried to persuade himself that he was in a dream, and strove to waken from it. Consciousness and memory, however, would not thus be cajoled out of their victim ; and it was amazing in what brief time, and with what vividness all that could render death itself terrible, and this death most terrible, rushed upon his imagination ! He had just discovered Lucrezia's innocence of some of the most heinous charges against her, and the fall of parts had shaken the whole fabric of accusation ; he felt that she had loved him, who now hated him so much as to have contrived his death ; he had raised to himself, by his own implacable coldness and arrogance, a rival who, if Lucrezia had spoken the truth against herself, would not long sigh in vain. His fancy raised an instantaneous vision of the tournament, in which Sir Reginald rode victor in the triumph at once of love and chivalry, securing the rewards of both ! His own absence to be regarded as a proof of cowardice, a confession of inability to maintain his vaunts against the glorious minion ! And he meanwhile a prince, wooed by all the delights of existence ; a soldier and a statesman full of noble projects ;—to perish miserably by a wanton's hate !

Those who had prepared the drug, which was evidently of an opiate nature, had either not calculated

that the knight would partake so largely of it, not intending the operation to be immediate, or had not sufficiently allowed for the counteractive power which the violent passions kindled in his blood offered to its preliminary stupor. Instead of yielding to the lethargy which had oppressed him, his whole frame tingled with a burning fever of wrath; and after using such simple remedies as the host suggested, on learning that he feared he had eaten some poisonous insect in the gum of a too ripe peach, he felt that the worst symptom was past. Languid, giddy, and enfeebled, indeed, he remained, and most unfit for the task which he meditated, but resolved to appal and vex the guilty eyes of Lucrezia with his apparition in the lists from which she had sent Death to keep him!

Still he was not so insensible to his own safety, but that he resolved, in the first place, to procure some efficacious antidote, and to ascertain with what poison the wine was compounded, in which he believed he had taken it. Unwilling to trust any one with his suspicions, he left the inn under pretext of slightly breathing himself and his horse; and knowing that the prohibition relating to the Ghetto was now expired, he hastened thither, thinking at once to propitiate the Jewish hags with the gold they so eagerly sought, and confident in their skill in the dismal branch of pharmacy the effects of which he had experienced.

He found both Notte and Morta in their shop or laboratory, engaged in sorting heaps of withered camomile and other flowers useful in their art, while

Miriam sat at their feet, occupied intently in the same toil, and singing, or rather twittering in imitation of some rare bird, which was beside her in a little gilded cage shaped like a mosque. The apothecaresses were obviously startled, but although Miriam gazed up at the knight, she gave him not the least sign of recognition or recollection.

Both the crones snatched at the bottle at once, when Alfonso presented it with a desire that they would tell him if there was any poisonous mixture in its contents, and he saw with satisfaction that they exchanged looks expressive of anger to find that their trade was exercised by others. But as soon as Notte had tasted it, she spat it out with the scorn of an experienced vintner tasting a bad wine. "Morta, drink it!—drink a cupful of it; it will not harm thee, child!" she said, laughing derisively. "What fearful fool hath mingled this? Go not to him again if thou wouldst buy death."

"Fool, fool thyself, how thou pratest!" said the more profound Morta. "A hand as subtle as our father's has seasoned this draught! no flavour, albeit the potent red dragon is in it! yet death could scarcely have been intended, unless in a watery blood! It is of such stuff as we sell to curious rivals, who would have the bridegroom fall asleep at the wedding feast. Unless some qualm foil it, he who takes a draught of this is but the show and presentment of a man!—powerless! his enemy shall strike him down with the shadow of his spear."

"My dishonour, then, if not my death, was intended!" said Alfonso inwardly, and the thought was

the more bitter, adding to Morta, "One whom I friend hath swallowed this potion—canst thou give me aught that will restore him to his powers, be it but for a few hours?"

"That hath been provided against—only beware that they bury not thy friend alive, for if the stupor is upon him, it will last itself out, sometimes sinking into the reality, but always wearing the semblance of death, if once soaked into the brain!" replied Morta; and Alfonso, who had indeed some doubts whether an antidote from such hands might not be as dangerous as the original draught, amply rewarded the hags, and retired, without venturing to solicit Miriam's attention.

The hour named for the tournament was now at hand, and though he felt scarcely able to support the weight of his armour, Alfonso delayed not to follow up his heroic determination; and his sable panoply was not among the last to appear among the multitudes thronging to the scene of action.

It was in the spot where the ancient masters of the Roman world had displayed their most prodigal splendour, that it pleased their modern imitator to exhibit his own,—in the Colosseum. Once again the vast ruin was filled with gazing myriads, all its galleries, shattered and destroyed as they were in parts, being occupied to the highest round by prodigious crowds of the jubilants.

It was very possible to believe for some instants, until the recollection was struck with the unclassical costumes of the congregated nations, that the days of the Roman empire had returned, and

that those innumerable spectators were assembled to behold some colossal display of the cruel magnificence for which the amphitheatre was built. It is true that the first circle above the arena was no longer occupied by a Roman emperor and senate, the golden knights and the vestal virgins, and the priests of a thousand gods; but a scaffolding of gilded poles, hung with purple velvet, and canopied with cloth-of-gold, concealed the ruins of the imperial gallery, and accommodated the pomp of their successors. The Pontiff occupied a throne which was ascended by several steps in the centre of this gallery; while Cæsar, habited still like a Roman consul, sat as judge of the field in a curule chair below, environed by a semicircle of ladies, his assistant jury, beyond which rose seats in gradation, filled with the most distinguished personages of the court—cardinals, princes, nobles, ambassadors, and illustrious jubilants.

Beneath this gallery and around the whole lowest range of the amphitheatre were hung the shields of all the knights who intended to join in the day's dangerous pastime—each watched by a trusty squire, with his master's banderol floating on a lance. The grim visage of William of Bampton was conspicuous among all, stern, and expressive of little satisfaction in the spectacle; for in truth his master's delay in accomplishing the object of his journey to Rome had for some time given him great uneasiness. The arena was cleared of its chief obstructions in fallen ruin or herbage, strewn deeply with sand, and kept

vacant by the exertions of a multitude of kings-at-arms, heralds, and marshals, and the crossed spears of a numerous guard at all the entrances.

Above the ground gallery arose the second grade of the amphitheatre, its weed-overgrown corridor, concealed beneath scarlet cloth, and densely occupied by spectators in the most various and sumptuous costumes. The effect was very magnificent and gay, for among them mingled a great number of women in the diversified and picturesque garbs of almost every state in Europe, certainly of every city and province of Italy, from the Juno-like robed Sicilian, to the half-naked Venetian, scandalizing her muffled Lombard neighbour with bare bosom and arms.

Although the Colosseum in the fifteenth century had not yet fallen into the grandeur of ruin in which it is now beheld, was not yet turned into the quarry whence the modern architect procured his materials, still the third tier of galleries, occupied as of old by the populace, was in many parts so dilapidated that it presented only zig-zag masses of spectators, some of whom seemed perched so high that they might touch the heavens with their hands. And those heavens!—a sea of blue becalmed—bright, lustrous, intense blue, whose transparent and motionless concave overhung the spectacle like a dome of sapphire. Lucrezia's popularity was very visibly displayed in these steeps occupied by the Roman populace, for in honour of her birthday, almost every one either carried a nosegay or wore a wreath of

flowers ; and as the Orsini marriage was approved by the people because it promised her tarriance in Rome, a vast number had decorated their breasts and caps with flame-coloured ribands streaming in the air, which, with the rich colours of the flowers that seemed to have exhausted the gardens of Italy, whose fields are such, glowing in the now meridian sun, gave the summits of the amphitheatre the many-tinted radiance of a peacock's tail.

The popular feeling was still more plainly evinced when Lucrezia arrived, heading the immense cavalcade of the knights, as Queen of the Tournament. Before her was borne, on a crimson cushion, by two kings-at-arms, attended by a dozen trumpeters with silver horns, and as many heralds, the splendid prize—a wreath of diamonds set with admirable skill, so as at once to form a most graceful convolution, and the words—"To the bravest—the fairest!" She rode a snow-white charger full of fire, but docile the least gesture, as if he, too, loved his beautiful mistress, tossing his plumed head high in the air, snorting, and arching his neck till his nostrils blew the foam off his broad breast and slender forelegs. The housings were of white velvet, sown with pearls, and Lucrezia's robe was of the same virgin-hued satin, wrought at the bosom and down the whole front with a cross of diamonds ; her train was of a light rose-coloured velvet, strewed with ruby stars, and borne by six pages ; but the only ornament which she wore on her head, beside its glory of golden ringlets, was a garland of white roses. A

canopy of silver damask was borne over her by two knights—the Orsino and Sir Reginald.

The former might have been styled, and indeed generally was, throughout the day—the White Knight, so elaborately had he covered himself with the colour of his lady's choice. His very armour, overlaid with plates of silver, shone white ; his surcoat, but for the crimson heart wrought in the centre, was white ; his shield was white, with a sufficiently blank motto—"This or love !" The bear on his crest was white—lance and scarf, and sword and belt all white—and truly it might be added that his visage was so too, though set with an expression of fixed determination, which promised as stout deeds of arms as the hilarity and joyous colour on Le Beaufort's.

But there was something more of the experienced tournayer in the English knight's appearance. His powerful and yet supple limbs were sheathed so perfectly in the steel which cased them, that the play of the strong muscles and vigorous sinews could be as plainly discerned as if he wore only silk, and displayed indeed a person whose youthful grace, activity, and strength, were of the kind which is said to win most favour in the eyes of women, the full energy of manhood not yet developed into coarseness. He bestrode a mighty English steed, embarrassed with no panoply but armour, and a plume of lofty broom flowers, and a dazzling effect was produced by the innumerable suns emblazoned in the steel, and especially one on his own breast, in the midst of which was the cheerful motto—"Of the sun indeed !"

We should need the pen of Homer (if he had one), and the privileges conferred by three thousand years of immortality, to venture on a descriptive catalogue of the innumerable chivalry which formed the cavalcade, and which extended as far as the topmost spectator could view—a tossing mass of glittering armour, helmets, plumes, and prancing steeds, and showy surcoats, and mingled blazonries of every land! All halted when Lucrezia had reached the arena until she ascended to a throne prepared for her in front of the fair jury, amidst a thunder of delighted acclamations, in which Alexander himself could not forbear audibly joining. The Orsino and Sir Reginald then took their stations beneath the throne, and a universal flourish of trumpets invited the knights to continue their advance.

But for the order in which the marshals grouped them as they entered, even the vast area of the Colosseum could scarcely have contained the numerous aspirants to the honours of that illustrious day. And yet it is probable that not one escaped at least a momentary notice from Lucrezia as they crowded in; so that when at length the Hospitaller entered in his dark panoply she observed him instantly. The whole amphitheatre was between them—but she started as if with an electric shock at the terrible glance which met hers, and stared indeed for several instants as if she had beheld a spectre newly risen from the grave. This proof of guilt reanimated the sinking powers of the Hospitaller, and few of the wine-flushed and holiday warriors rode with more

stalwart dignity into the arena than the half-poisoned and soul-exhausted Knight of St. John.

The masses were at length concentrated—silence proclaimed—and a herald with stentorian lungs declared the conditions of the tournament. All who engaged in it were to be noble both by father and mother, of legitimate birth, untainted with any crime or dishonour, not excepted against by any lady or damsel, and unassisted by any supernatural arms or defences. The weapons to be used were blunt lances of ash, the back edge of the sword, or axe, and unpointed daggers; no stroke below the girdle was to be considered lawful, and to kill a horse deprived the offender of his own, and of all claim to the prize. The combat was to be that of the *Mêlée* or *Medley*, which imitated the confusion of a battle, and was usually adopted when the number of candidates for glory was very great, as on the present occasion, observing of course some distinctions, which, although the laws of this hurly burly contest were generally known, were recited, that no one might pretend ignorance. Each onset, or in modern fisticuff phrase, round, was to last three lances—that is, each knight, if he were not disabled, in addition to the lance with which he commenced, might use two more, held in readiness by his squire. Whoever unhorsed an opponent, provided that he was not himself thrown three times, might enter in the next onset; and whoever, after having used his three lances, failed either to overthrow an adversary, bend him back in his crupper by strength of lance, or

strike off his helmet, was to quit the conflict altogether. No two or more knights were permitted under the most severe denunciations of ignominy, scorn of the ladies, and forfeiture of arms and horse, to assail one at the same time; and as the confusion and violence of these tournaments nearly resembled those of a battle, the squires were exhorted to win themselves honour, and to show how nobly and dexterously they could serve their masters in that more perilous conjuncture, by removing the fallen from the press, helping them to remount, furnishing them with new lances, unclasping their vizors to allow them breath, and other services of the like nature.

The herald concluded by announcing punishments for proved transgressions of these rules, and by inviting all the gentle chivalry whose hearts were animated by love, to be admitted into an order of knighthood which he was pleased to found, and had deputed his Queen, the Lady Lucrezia Borgia, to confer on all who desired to enter it.

This proposition was received with a deafening shout of approval from the warriors, echoed by the whole assembly save one or two; and the manner of the initiation was indicated by Paolo Orsino, who eagerly claimed his right to be the first received in it. "Be it so—and Sir Reginald shall be the last!" said Lucrezia, smiling as the young knight knelt to present to her the sword which she had confided to his care. Drawing the weapon with his assistance, she advanced to the edge of the platform, and slightly

laid it on Paolo's shoulder, as he bent deeply on his war-horse to receive the distinction, and he then passed on, in an order previously arranged, and a concourse of the eager chivalry followed, who all pressed to the gentle stroke with enthusiastic rivalry, many of them earning at the same time some precious favours from their lady-loves in the gallery—such as scarfs, knots of riband, jewels, and other ornaments.

The throng around the Hospitaller rapidly thinned, as the innumerable knights of love hastened to enrol themselves in his chivalry; and, at length, looking up from a disordered reverie, he found himself nearly alone—only two knights adhered to what seemed to be a forlorn cause. The great bulk of one of these revealed him to be Vitellozzo—the other quickly revealed himself.

“By my faith, Knight of Jerusalem! seeing that we owe one another but little now, I am well content to stand by you in your quarrel against the Borgias!” said Oliverotto da Fermo, with a strange smile.

“Among us—if sinews carry it, we may surely hinder the proud strumpet of her will for once,” said Vitellozzo, with his habitual brutality and violence. “And yonder galliard boy whom she hath taken so fairly in her meshes—look! she leans upon his goodly shoulder as he kneels, for weariness, no doubt,—fie, wanton!—if I bring him not to the ground like a winged mallard—look! she makes a dint in the steel with her amorous paddling!—but, by my saint, his bones shall ache too much for it to-night, damsel!”

“She counterfeits a faintness—inhuman perfidy!” groaned the Knight of St. John. “But, Lord Vitello, I pray you of your gentleness, let me first try my fortune with him—and I care not what else befalls.”

“I will not yield my hope to make all that snow puff with grief that now swells with amorousness, for as much gold as would roof Castello!” returned the burly chieftain.

“And by your beard, Vitellozzo, I will have my stroke to despoil him of that fair sword—look, she gives it to him!” exclaimed Oliveretto.

“Good knight, its work is done!—wear it for my sake,” were indeed the words which now came to their ears, pronounced by Lucrezia as she handed the weapon to Sir Reginald. “Do me some gentle strokes with it to-day—and keep it for thy rougher sports for ever!”

Delighted almost to ecstasy, Le Beaufort kissed the fair hand that bestowed the gift so passionately, that a general titter arose among the ladies; in the midst of which, vaulting from the platform on his steed with matchless dexterity, the knight dashed it forward into a magnificent charging attitude, and flashing the sword over his head, shouted till the arena rang again, “Lucrezia against the world, with either edge!”

“I accept the challenge,” replied a still louder cry, and the Hospitaller galloped furiously forward, throwing his lance on the ground, drawing his sword, and striking it with such frenzied rage against Le Beaufort’s, that sparks flew all around, and the young

knight, not expecting such an onset, scarcely retained his hold.

“Why, brother-in-arms! what is this?” said Le Beaufort, dropping the point of his weapon the instant he perceived who his assailant was, and in that brief pause Alfonso’s reason had returned.

“Ha, ha! ’tis but to show ye, Knights of Love, we of Honour are of good cheer yet!” he said, laughing hoarsely. “You vaunt it too proudly over our fewness—but few as we are, ere night, I promise,—some both wished and intended we should be fewer.”

Sir Reginald laughed good humouredly, though he perceived not the wit of the allusion. “Let us to deeds, then, brother!” he exclaimed. “My heart is getting too impatient for its mew, and there is nothing pleasanter than the clashing of tournaments except the real hurly burly of battle. Largess! largess!” and with this cry he threw a handful of gold among the heralds and pursuivants, an example which was immediately followed by all the chivalry as a reward for the exertions of the meritorious functionaries, and a signal that they desired the lists to be cleared for deeds of arms.

While the heralds collected their rewards into a common heap for future division, Cæsar stood up, and commanded the kings-at-arms to divide the arena with a rope of curiously rich dyes, which they held up at a distance of about thirty paces from the opposite entrances of the Colosseum. The knights were then requested to ride out at the entrance to-

wards the Palatine, and turning round the amphitheatre, to re-enter at that of the Esquiline, each jousting, taking an opposite side of the rope to that of him who preceded, so as to divide the whole chivalry with all possible fairness of chance. This formed no small portion of the amusement of the spectators in the amphitheatre, and also of a great multitude assembled outside, who were only enabled to see the knights in this procession, and to hear the triumphant music to which they marched.

Although strenuous commands had been issued that no one should presume to disturb the pomp of the spectacle with outcries, gestures, or other intimations of opinion, the chatter, the laughter, the shouts, continued so incessantly, that, as there was no instant of silence to contrast, not even the all-important and all-interfering marshals noticed it.

In a brief space the combatants were arranged in two solid squadrons along the whole length of the arena which, vast as it was, could scarcely contain them—the oldest and most experienced knights averring that, except in the marshalry of great battles, they had never seen so many renowned and illustrious crests opposed. A clear space of about a hundred feet was reserved between these masses to give sufficient impetus to the shock of their encounter, which was diligently kept by the sergeants-at-arms. And now the division was nearly completed, only one knight remained to be placed who had purposely reserved himself that he might be sure to get into the rank opposite to Sir Reginald, and this was the Hospitaller, who, lingering in his transit round

the amphitheatre, suffered a new annoyance when he was at length about to enter it. Paschino called to him with the familiarity of an old acquaintance, from the top of a conical ruin, which is said to have been a fountain, where he had perched himself in a vain hope of seeing something of the spectacle within. "In mercy's name! do but gratify my curiosity, knight! to tell me who occupy the seats of the vestal virgins? Give me argument for eternal laughter, and say—'tis Lucrezia and her ladies!"

"Laugh on then, little spider, till thy venom bag bursts and chokes thee with thine own bitterness!" replied the angry knight, passing into the arena. Discerning at a glance on which side Le Beaufort was posted, he checked his rein towards the opposite, but was immediately met by the truncheons of the marshals; and then as if the whole multitude had fathomed the secret of his soul, and derided its incongruous nature, so loud a shout of laughter arose that the immense ruins seemed to shake as if with an earthquake.

But the matter was explained almost at the very instant when Alfonso was about to make some furious outbreak. "Give the odd man to us, marshals, in common fairness; no two of us can match the lord of Castello!" said Le Beaufort, unconsciously, by the laughter which the gibe provoked, adding to the animosity of his fellow-guest, which his open nature did not suspect, and who, being in the opposite ranks, had managed to post himself in front of the English knight.

"Take him then to your own aid, for I mean to

try my lance on you, sweet gentleman!" replied the gigantic chieftain, fiercely.

"Take advice, and do not—for one such fall as I can give to knights of your flesh puts them to bed for a month!" replied the knight, somewhat offendedly.

"Sirs, this may not be—we must appeal to his highness the judge of the field!" said a grave king-at-arms, who had advanced, and who accordingly hastened to Cæsar's throne.

He returned in a few minutes with the duke's decision that until the combatants already ranged became odd by the chances of the conflict the Hospitaller must remain out; consoling himself with the advantage in the reservation of his strength. Meanwhile the duke desired him to take his station near himself, to assist him and the ladies in the judgment of the field.

Knowing that it was in vain to resist, and feeling at the same time a relapse into an extreme weakness, Alfonso tacitly obeyed, and half unconsciously found himself posted beside Cæsar, listening to his condolences, and immediately under the eyes of Lucrezia and her ladies.

Alfonso's strength returned with the violence of his indignation when he perceived that she looked at him with an instant's intense wondering and sorrowful gaze—doubtless to mark and regret the little mischief her potion had wrought, for he knew not that his visage was so deadly pale!

"Welcome, Sir Dolorous!" said Cæsar, smilingly.
"But that it might ill become me to contend with

my guests, I would have sided with you, merely out of spite to the women, who have given me so many restless nights ! but now I see why they were nigh killed with laughter yesterday when your English brother described to them a manner of sport they have in his land called a cock-fight, thinking of their own to day,—for 'tis nothing other ; and mark you not how each watches her chanticleer as eagerly as if she had staked a dozen gold crowns on his mettle, and how the proud birds purfle and stalk ? But you have not saluted our fair hens at anxious roost above !”

“It were a lost courtesy—their souls are in the lists below,” replied Alfonso, gazing, and yet scarcely noticing anything in the scene before him.

The spectacle was now at its greatest point of splendour ; the two lines of the opposing combatants were on the eagerest strain of the start, lances fixed, bending forward in intense expectation, their steeds tossing and foaming with impatience, and all their panoply and plumes one restless mass of glitter, colour, and flash. But the Hospitaller remembered nothing very distinctly afterwards, until suddenly the cry of the heralds “ Let do !—let do !” the crash of a thousand warlike instruments—the simultaneous shout and rising of the vast assembly—the flying away of the rope—announced the decisive moment of the onset ! The next instant and the cloud of sand tossed from unnumbered hoofs—the clash of armour—the splintering of lances—the fall of rider and man—the cries of squires and pursuivants—a deafening uproar of acclamations, shrieks of women,

neighing of horses, triumphal bursts of music—declared that the passage of arms had commenced! Among a hundred saddles instantly emptied, Alfonso saw only that the mighty Vitellozzo was hurled over, steed and rider, beneath the lance of Sir Reginald—and that, continuing his career, the English knight overthrew three more in succession, among whom was the adventurous Oliverotto.

Such of the overthrown as could rally their energies, assisted by the squires, caught their horses and remounted; those who could not were raised by the same faithful attendants; but true to his promise, Sir Reginald had sent Vitellozzo to the ground with such violence that he was taken up insensible and bleeding from eyes and ears, his great bulk with difficulty carried off by half a dozen squires, like a bull's from the arena. And this exploit was signaled by an audible exclamation of satisfaction from the pontiff. But Oliverotto quickly recovered himself, and seemingly bent on vengeance, seized a new lance, (his own was broken against Le Beaufort's shield,) leaped into his saddle, and rushed round to meet Sir Reginald, who was continuing his exploits with a success which amazed the Italian spectators, and drew down incessant shouts of applause and wonder. Le Beaufort, laughing aloud with the delight of his fierce pastime, was overthrowing all before him, but hearing shouts of warning from the populace, whose favourite his successes had instantly rendered him, he wheeled round to meet whatever foe might be following. It happened that the Orsino was immediately after him, who had already dis-

played an enthusiasm which had in it something of the desperation and ferocious violence of a real battle, and had overthrown many who imagined themselves more than a match for him. Whether he was blinded by the passions which urged him on, or in reality sought the perilous glory of overthrowing the English knight, our chronicler but conjectures, certain only that the Orsino drove full tilt at the breast of Le Beaufort—who then exhibited the noblest quality of his chivalric character, for sinking his own lance, he suffered the whole shock of his opponent's weapon, which bent him back in the crupper, but shivered in the deed, and springing up again in the saddle with a sprightly—"Ha, Paolo, thou hast my breath on thy lance!" he passed on, and dashed Oliverotto from his saddle as if he had been a figure of stuffed straw, with what little or none remained in his lungs! The generosity and heroic valour of the whole deed struck the noble chords which are in every human breast, though sometimes rusted and discordant—and there arose such a tempest of applause—such deafening Vivas—Hurrahs—Vive-vives! Vivats! that when some gladiator did bravely in the ancient times under the gaze of eighty thousand spectators, never was there a louder tumult. But the most precious tribute of all was Lucrezia's involuntary repetition of the young knight's motto—*O mon Le Beaufort!*—which all around her distinctly heard.

But among his fellow-combatants this universal applause kindled as general a desire to carry away the glory of the overthrow of so distinguished a

knight; in especial the French cavaliers, of whom there were many present, learning that he was English, essayed all that the brilliant skill and courage of their nation could do against him. But the thews and sinews of the English youth, and his unconquerable resolve still bore him off victorious from every encounter, until humanity itself seemed incapable of farther exertion, without some pause. The kings-at-arms, while recording his achievements with astonishment, entreated him to reserve some strength for the subsequent contests; even Lucrezia sent in vain the requests of herself and the ladies to give himself some rest, since in him they placed their chief hopes; until he had shivered the last of his three spears, he would not leave the field, and then rode, covered with dust and warlike sweat, but with a gay and prancing movement of his equally English steed, to thank the ladies for their concern in his behalf.

“If your king called you *The Beaufort*—henceforth we are determined to call you *The Knight*! you have no match in Italy—none in the world!” said Lucrezia, with a female enthusiasm for valour, perhaps quickened by the fierce glance of the Hospitaller. “Would the hour were come to relieve you of that steel, for you must needs be hurt by the Orsino’s ungentle blow!—and, if you will accept such awkward squires, myself and damsels will rejoice in the task. Meanwhile, I pray you, wipe the dust from your visage with this kerchief!”

And she handed her own—one of precious woof,

curiously embroidered, and certainly gifted with effects as poisonous as that of the Moor of Venice. But using it only to press to his lips, the young knight tied it round his arm, exclaiming, "Now I cannot fail!"

Meanwhile the conflict in the lists continued, though with less interest in the spectators, until the achievements of the Orsino began to attract general attention. Feeling that his triumph against Le Beaufort had brought on him general disapprobation, himself ashamed of it, and anxious to efface the recollection, his former motives were so reinforced that he gained a strength like that of madness; and his fury materially aided in the rapid winnowing which now took place among the combatants, a considerable part of whom, stunned by severe falls, or with dislocated limbs, were continually retiring from the conflict. Finally, the last lance of this first struggle which remained unbroken of those who had the power to use the prescribed number, was found in the Orsino's hand.

The moment the first onset finished, the heralds hurried to compare notes before Cæsar; the pursuivants to clear the arena of all the shattered pieces of armour, the scarfs, the plumes, the jewels, which all became their perquisites. A chronicler relates that of broken lances alone there might have been kindled a bonfire to roast a dozen oxen! The squires hastened to undo the armour of their lords during the breathing space, to hand them wine and other refreshments, and solace them with tidings of what

they had observed of their valour ; while the sergeants-at-arms busily examined the bundles of fresh lances which were brought in, to be certain that they were all of the prescribed form and thickness. The Orsino hastened to join Le Beaufort beneath the balcony of the ladies. He was received at first with évident coldness by all the fair bevy, until he said, handing his lance to Sir Reginald, "Here is one which your pupil was determined to win for you, to beg the pardon of another that did wrong—but in heedlessness."

"It was a shrewd stroke—but I am only woman within my breast, for there only the blow pained me, coming from thee—for had we not promised to forbear each other?" said the young knight, jocundly. "But I knew thou didst it not of purpose, but in the pell-mell, where a man might drive at his father's grey beard. Yet, in faith, if this lance win me the prize, it shall not be against its giver."

Paolo was touched, and Lucrezia, pleased with his evident feeling, praised his achievements so warmly that his desire to renew them was heightened to its former feverish violence.

Fruit and wines were now distributed to all the pontifical guests and the knights ; but it was observed that the Hospitaller refused either with a shudder. And yet he had long felt his strength ebbing away, and it was with difficulty he kept upright in his saddle.

The preparations continued for the second onset, which was likely to prove a far more obstinate one than the first, as only the bravest and most skilful

knights remained to contest it, more than half the number being weeded out. Cæsar had been for a long time engaged in consultation with kings-at-arms and heralds; but at length it was declared that Sir Reginald had won the first praise of valour, and the Orsino the second. This was of no advantage to either, except to soften the possible ultimate defeat; for all who had accomplished the feat of overthrowing one opponent, were entitled to continue the struggle for the prize. On hearing the declaration, and the numbers for the renewed contest, the Hospitaller roused himself with a strong effort of mind over matter, and demanded a place in it. "But inasmuch as I should not enter it, being fresh, let me first break a lance with the two victors of the onset—Sir Reginald first," he exclaimed, endeavouring to speak with calmness.

"Nay—for I am grieved, good knight, but the numbers are again equal," said Cæsar. "You must yet abide your time; since none of these can breathe during a second course without forfeiting all the honour he won in the first."

"Yet I will yield my place, to give my brother-in-arms room to display his noble chivalry; I shall be well recompensed by remaining here," said the generous knight of England.

"Why so, then, it shall be. The Lord Orsino longs to essay your Lombard chivalry," said Cæsar, and, with inexpressible disappointment and vexation, but finding that he could not possibly retreat, Alfonso was compelled to accept the proffer. The look of enthusiastic approbation which Lucrezia cast on Sir

Reginald, seemed, however, to revive all the exhausted powers of his frame. Emulation and a burning thirst for revenge chased off the insidious languor with which the potion he had swallowed yet lingered in his veins; and when the trumpets again blew to the charge, few rushed into the conflict with a more furious determination to triumph in it, or perhaps with more likelihood, if the wild excitement did not pass away.

The second battle might almost be considered a repetition of the first, save that it was contended during a much longer time, with more skill, and with less of the mad impetuosity of the outbreak. From different causes, the same thing animated both Alfonso and the Orsino to almost superhuman exertions—Lucrezia now fairly hung over her balcony, eyes, ears, and soul rapt in the spectacle below,—Alfonso imagined, to rejoice in his overthrow procured by her inhuman arts, while the Orsino was stimulated by the desire to prove that he could maintain her cause as valiantly as Sir Reginald, and by his hatred of the supposed envoy undefinedly mingled with jealousy. But with all this mutual ill-will, accident prevented them from coming to an encounter, until the continual triumphs of Alfonso stimulated the Orsino's exasperation, and the thinning of the ranks permitted him to indulge it. "Ho, Knight of St. John!" he shouted. "Now is the time of which I spoke to you erewhile!—Let us cross spears! Lucrezia and Love!"

"Our Lady and Chastity!" replied Alfonso, and they rushed at one another, lance in rest, the knights

in general pausing to give their fury way. The next instant the Orsino lay upon the sands of the lists, and his courser was galloping wildly and unmastered round them—the saddle for the first time on that day emptied.

Le Beaufort hastened with the Orsino's squires to raise him, but ere they arrived Paolo was on his feet, staggering about to regain his horse, and dizzy like a drunken man. But there was something in Alfonso's demeanour which excited general indignation; he laughed loudly and scornfully, and glanced up at Lucrezia with a frenzied exultation which she felt in her soul's core, and which stirred Le Beaufort's hot blood at once with pity and anger. Regardless of any sign of opinion, Alfonso continued to rage like some hero of fabulous romance, until no one dared to meet his shock, and he overthrew almost without resistance, remaining undoubted triumpher in the second contest, but without extorting any mark of popular admiration or sympathy.

The Orsino sat, much exhausted, in a chair beneath the balcony of the ladies, comforted somewhat by Lucrezia's condolence, and the attentions of his friend, but still burning with secret indignation. The moment the course was finished, he sprang up, and commanded his squires to relock his armour for a new assault. At this moment, Lucrezia's eye wandered to the Hospitaller, who had raised his vizor to breathe, and was leaning motionless on his lance in the centre of the arena. "Nay, my lord, you have rested; our cause needs no advantages, and the

Knight of St. John is spent !” she exclaimed. “Duke Cæsar, this must not be.— We will not win unfairly.”

The duke glanced expressively at the Orsino, as he replied, “Our sister fulfils a Christian precept ;— but we deem ’tis justly urged. The third onset shall be fought without any of the three triumphers, and there will remain, ’tis like, the very flower and essence of the luckier chivalry to contend against them !”

The decrees of the Judge of the Field were always absolute, and one of the three champions indeed was evidently too much exhausted. The spectators beheld that when Alfonso’s squires put his horse in motion to lead him out of the lists, he sank forward on its neck, and with difficulty straightened himself again in the saddle. It seemed that even Lucrezia was moved at the sight, or desired to complete her work ; for a page of her suite arrived with a goblet of wine, which he was commanded in her name to request him to accept. The Hospitaller instantly seized the goblet, and poured the whole rich beverage on the sand, returning it empty to the page. “Our Lady of Purity supports me ! I need none other,” was his reply to the astonished attendant, and to the still more amazed and disconcerted gazer.

And now began the third onset, which, to the surprise of many, was as furious and more lasting than either of the preceding ; for not only was the grain thrice bolted, but those who remained in the contest were rekindled and desperate with the narrowing of the circle of hope. Heralds in general allowed that brighter feats of chivalry had not been exhibited

within their recollection; and one ancient king-at-arms, nearly a century old, declared, in the exultation of his heart, that knighthood had reached its highest splendour, and could but henceforth decay.

These three conflicts had wasted nearly the whole of the day, and Le Beaufort, in his impatience, kept up an uneasy glancing at the sun, which began to decline; but, at length, the third triple of lances was exhausted, and of the five hundred which began the battles, only forty remained to contest the prize with Alfonso, the Orsino, and Sir Reginald; but as the triumpher in this round had not given so many strokes as Paolo in the contest in which he was only second to Le Beaufort, he was declared to be champion of it. Paolo now hastened to Cæsar's chair, and earnestly requested that the last contest might be with swords.

"Nay, for ye are all too angry-coloured, and mayhap will turn the edges," replied Cæsar. "And for the same cause, we ordain that unless there be no other opponents, none of you three shall tilt at the other, or shall forfeit the prize."

The discontent of the Orsino was very visible, and he muttered in a low tone, "Signor, you too favour the envoy!—he hath already thrown me at the lance; my horse wavers at his black panoply."

"Tut, man, I have observed him this half hour; his colours come and go like a Sallee rover's—he shall be the more spent to your hand," returned the duke, in the same voice. "I care not, for my part, if your lance had a point to gore a buffalo mad, and were in his back!"

After a sufficient rest allowed to the late combatants, once more the lines were marshalled; and the excitement, which had been long languishing, was renewed with more than its first energy, but in a different manner. Attention was concentrated and silent; all hung eagerly forward, even those on the most slippery elevations, but no one uttered a sound; the very women ceased to buzz their hopes and fears. The kings-at-arms who guarded the prize raised it more loftily on their gilded staves, the diamonds sparkling ruby tints in the westering sun; the trumpets that timed the marshals fluttered with the agitation of their blowers. It was remarked that when the Hospitaller was summoned, he did not seem to hear until his squires had twice admonished him; and then he came into the lists with a slow and trailing movement. Even when the onset began he appeared like one awaking slowly from a lethargy; and suddenly the rude shock of a French spear, which carried off his helmet, tearing all its lacings asunder, revealed him glaring around as if awakened on the start, deadly pale, and paler by contrast with his raven hair. A faint female cry was heard, which became general and mingled with those of men, and especially of the marshals, when, without accepting the helmet which his squire instantly raised, the Hospitaller dashed on like a madman, and overthrew the Frenchman, and two more knights in his way. Excited then by a furious emulation, Sir Reginald and the Orsino even surpassed their former achievements. But the resistance was desperate and prolonged; instead of the shivered armour and spears,

the sands became reddened all over with large drops of blood. Several fell from exhaustion, after defying every effort of their enemies to overthrow them. Cæsar himself seemed fearful of the results; and once or twice, as the conflict waxed very close and furious, he raised his baton as if intending to interpose; and as the Hospitaller had not resumed his helmet, insensible to all the cries of his squire, but continued to rage on, there seemed a justifiable pretext. But something in the horror-struck tone in which Lucrezia called upon him to interfere, so diverted him that he could not for laughing—when suddenly all necessity ceased. Six knights only remained excepting the three who were forbidden to attack each other—and these six, on the verge of exhaustion and blind with rage and emulation, rushed at each other with such transcendant fury that all were overthrown, horses and all, as if with the scattered destruction of a thunderbolt.

After a moment's pause of general astonishment, there arose a deafening uproar, which subsided into a sudden and appalling silence when the spectators beheld what instantly followed.

The pallid visage of the Hospitaller flushed some unearthly colour, his eyes flamed madly, his whole frame shook with the convulsions of a passion which seemed too violent for the frame of humanity to endure; and whirling his horse round as if to take room for a charge, he yelled till the amphitheatre rung in every crevice, "Have at you now, English boy!"

"Nay, Lombard! unless my brother the Orsino's

arm fails—I contend no longer for the prize!—It is sufficient that Love triumphs over your rudeness!” replied Sir Reginald, with strong and ill-suppressed emotion, partly at the strange bitterness of his once brother-in-arms, but chiefly with regret at the enormous sacrifice which his generous friendship made, —perhaps unknown to himself, with an intention of refuting Paolo’s rising suspicions.

“With none but thee!” shouted the Hospitaller, wheeling his horse, poising his lance, and taking his career. “I have but strength for thee! I have overthrown the Orsino—the repetition were easy—but thou!—I say, thou!—Knight of England! if thou art not a coward, a dastard!—before thy mistress I say it!—a slave to be spat upon in the market-place—if ——”

But ere he had reached thus far Le Beaufort had dashed his spurs to the rowels in his steed, and rushed forward like a mountain-torrent suddenly bursting through some dam—without observing that the Orsino, half maddened with his share of the insult, was also in full career;—neither did the Hospitaller, absorbed in the frenzy of his feeling against Le Beaufort. In vain arose on every side one universal shout and shriek; in vain did the truncheon of the judge fall; in vain did marshals and heralds rush in! The decisive moment was passed, and the Hospitaller encountering at the same instant the shock of two lances urged with all the violence which the madness of passion could give, was hurled to a considerable distance from his horse, and lay stretched

on his back on the lists, his head bleeding from behind so as to redden all the black hair, his breast-plate torn away and blood soaking through the silk doublet within, perfectly motionless, and apparently dead !

CHAPTER XV.

“Sith there is yet a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
As doth invert the attest of eyes and ears,
As if those organs had deceptive functions,
Created only to calumniate.”

SHAKSPERE.

DURING several days after the tournament the Knight of St. John enjoyed but a degree of twilight consciousness. Something he afterwards remembered of a rushing crowd, of being borne along gently but rapidly, as if by the wind, and of the cold air of a river blowing strongly on his face. Then all was lost until opening his eyes, stretched as though on a bank of soft grass, numerous faces swam around him, and he had a distinct recollection of a hooded nun washing his wounded breast with some balmy fluid, while divers sages, in black mantles and furred caps, spoke in low and mysterious mutterings around. He remembered little more until, awaking with a start from a deep sleep, he found himself extended on a magnificent couch, covered with white velvet brocade, and propped on cushions of

white satin. The walls were hung with arras, wrought with representations of the loves of the gods, which future times have considered somewhat exceeding even the licence of those in which they were devised. The ceiling was painted with a Hymen and Cupids showering flowers on the couch below ; and from this circumstance, and the predominance of white and silver in the ornaments, it seemed like a bridal chamber but just made ready for the reception of some royal pair. Among all the objects around him Alfonso recognised only one—Messer Pietro Bembo—who was busied in penning some inspiration, which he huddled up the moment he perceived his lord looking at him with an understanding and remembering eye, but which was undoubtedly headed “Ad Lucretiam.”

Alfonso's recollections rapidly returned, and he began to make inquiries which for some time Bembo endeavoured to avoid answering, until he found that the prince was more irritated by his silence than he could be by his communicativeness. Alfonso then learned with amazement and chagrin that he was in an apartment of the Vatican, whither he had been conveyed by the pontiff's orders ; and where he had been sedulously attended by his holiness's own surgeons, an ancient lady, nurse to Donna Lucrezia, and a nun of the Agonizants, whose charitable dedication it was to attend the sick and console the dying. All had been unremitting in attentions ; the pope sent messengers hourly to inquire into his state ; the canon had it in command to wait upon Donna Lucrezia three times in the day to report it ;

the Penitentiary had presented himself several times to administer spiritual assistance. Alfonso began to suspect that the canon had betrayed his rank ; but he declared to the contrary with such solemnity, averring that as his abhorrence of the lady had so vehemently increased, he knew that to divulge it would bring him into a position of great danger—that the prince could not refuse him credence.

“ And the false and dishonoured knights who hurled me from my horse with a conjoint treachery ! which of them has won the prize,—wherein, by my father’s life, he shall not long exult ! ” said the Hospitaller, with a violence which announced either the return of strength to his exhausted frame, or renewed fever.

“ Nay, my lord, Le Beaufort wept when he saw what had happened, and all men agreed that it was an accident ; and as oft as he meets me in the palace, though he is yet mad with the words you gave him, and the Orsino, to my thought, rejoices in your evil chance—he asks how fares it with you as tenderly as an it were for his brother,” replied Bembo. “ As to the prize, no man hath it ; the Duke of Romagna has impounded it for farther advice.”

“ In the palace ? A frequent guest, I doubt not, of Lucrezia. Methought I heard her laugh the loudest when I fell ! ”

“ I have not heard her grace laugh loudly at all,” replied Bembo. “ But certain I am, she laughed neither loudly nor lowly on occasion of your lordship’s mishap, for she immediately swooned away,

and, as I happened to be at hand, in my arms, so that I could not mistake."

"She feared for her minion!" bitterly replied Alfonso.

"Who that may be, I guess not, but certes your grace was the only one to be feared for at the instant. Why, she even delayed the tournament feast until the mediciners pronounced you in no danger, for at the time the strange symptom of your deep sleeps had not struck them, which were not, the little Greek declares, lethargies of concussion, but some wonderful and admirable provision of nature to restore the exhaustion of the spirits, which is the worst part of your injuries."

Alfonso smiled derisively and bitterly at this medical acumen, remembering the fatal potion, the effects of which he had struggled against on the whole of that eventful day, but which had finally contributed in no small degree to his defeat.

"I shall revive, then, it seems, from that, and soon," he replied. "And after I have righted myself on the English minion, I have nothing more to do in Rome; and, canon, we will depart satisfied that our bruises are no worse."

"Let us depart at once, if at all, my lord; for indeed you have no wrong to avenge on the young knight," said Bembo pathetically.

"But art thou assured of that? Yea, I am convinced that by this time—nay, indeed they must laugh together when they think of it," ejaculated Alfonso.

"I shall be infinitely blamed by the mediciners for stirring you thus; and a melon against a millet-seed, here they come!" exclaimed the canon, hearing a footstep; but if any one had taken his wager, he would have lost the melon, for the opening door admitted Fra Bruno.

Although of its wonted studious pallor, the visage of the friar betrayed none of the emotion which, remembering the manner of their parting, the sight of Alfonso would seem naturally to rekindle. Excepting that his eye shunned Alfonso's, his demeanour was inexpressibly gentle and compassionate. He seated himself beside the couch, and observing that he had some skill in the mediciner's art, he felt the patient's pulse.

"It is still perturbed, but life returns in its full tide," he said, thoughtfully. "Yet, if I have any skill, your lesion is as much of mind as body; and perchance I might bestow some soothing emollients to the wounds within," and he glanced significantly at Bembo.

"Nay, reverendissimè, I cannot leave my friend for an instant, for so I faithfully promised the gentle nun," said the canon.

"The nun!—have you a nun among your attendants, signor?" said Fra Bruno, with a melancholy smile.

"And I am pledged not to suffer any medications to be applied to the wounds but those which she spreads, under sanction of the physicians," continued Bembo, resolutely, and with a suspicion in his manner which struck the Hospitaller.

“Indeed!—then even in your presence, master canon, I must bid you beware, Knight of Ferrara!” exclaimed the Dominican, with a glance full of trouble and anguish. “I know that some frenzy has deceived you into mistrust of mine intents—the malice of my enemies gives to all my acts, even of Christian charity, of gratitude, of ghostly concern in a penitent’s relapses—hideous misinterpretations! But although my predictions and warnings seem contradicted by the event, although you are here as an honoured and cherished guest, in this chamber which beheld the Prince of Salerno, within one little moon, a bridegroom delirious with happiness—a corpse covered with bleeding wounds! I tell you, suffer no woman to medicine your hurts—whose unskilful or too skilled hands—gangrene I have known oft to follow on a raw wound tented thus!”

“Fra Bruno, since we last met, I have had much cause to think your warnings as faithful as the raven’s, however prompted,” replied Alfonso, starting convulsively up from his soft pillows. “Yea, death was tendered to me in as fair a guise as it may now be amid this magnificence! Poison was administered to me in fruit and wine, a slow, lethargic poison, intending both my dishonour and destruction.”

“Your reverend lordship will be much and fitly blamed for this influx of delirium,” said Bembo, reproachfully.

“Why, so I will believe it—so I will hope! Signor, it could not be, or was meant only to hinder you from appearing against her at the tournament,” said the friar, hurriedly. “But, indeed—I have

heard something of this. I beseech you depart with all speed from Rome, for the Borgias—but if this chamber be dumb to you, the eloquence of an angel were in vain!”

“Doth the ointment pain you, my lord, which is now on your torn breast?” said Bembo, fairly aghast.

“No, to the contrary—it soothes as if Love had gathered the simples for Esculapius,” replied the prince.

“And your hurts are fast healing—the bruises paling—your senses clear and perfectly restored,” continued the bewildered canon. “I know not what ye speak of drugs and poisons, but on my faith, and as I live, I do believe that this nun who washes them as much in her tears as in the mediciner’s lotions, is Donna Lucrezia herself, for I detected her by her matchless hand, and a rare emerald on it, forgotten in hurry and agitation.

“Can this be possible?” exclaimed Alfonso, staring at the Dominican.

“It was even thus with the Prince of Salerno—him too I warned—but he tarried on,” said Fra Bruno calmly, and rising to depart. “But let this oracle remain with thee, son—if the light and varying fancy of a woman wavers now to preserve thee, thou art only the more assured of destruction from a sterner nature which nothing human ever yet restrained!”

“Let us leave this fatal palace—Rome itself—on the instant, signor!” ejaculated Bembo; and while he spoke, footsteps were audible, scarcely heeded in

his agitation until the door opened, and four dignitaries of the healing art, one of whom was a Greek and a dwarf, accompanied by two females, made their appearance. The sages wore the robes and hoods peculiar to their office, for two centuries were yet given to them ere, in evil hour, the disciples of Galen resigned half their sway over human credulity with their imposing costume. One of the females was a closely veiled nun of the Agonizants; the other a grave, matronly dame, in black satin robe and hood, nearly covered with pricked lace, and with a most respectable and demure air, in whom, nevertheless, Alfonso recognized Mona Faustina.

Fra Bruno paused, eyeing the nun with a piercing glance, to which she only replied by a reverential bend, approaching the patient's couch. The little Greek, who was one of the best physicians of Rome, and was known by the name of "Il Gobbo," immediately directed the women to remove the bandages, an office which the sages seemed to consider below their dignity. But when the nun made a modest gesture, as if to withdraw the coverlet from the knight's breast, he repulsed her with some violence, clutching her arm and griping rather than holding it, as he said, "No, good sister, no! for since an attempt was made to poison me by a woman, I have ever dreaded the softness of female touch; you shall not dress my wounds."

"To poison you, signor!" said the nun, faintly, but in an exceedingly alarmed voice.

"Or I were not now here—for it was the drugs they gave me in my meat, and not the lance of the

Orsino's accomplice, that laid me in the dust, for Borgias to laugh at!" continued the knight. "Go to, go to; you shall not touch me—unless indeed you unveil, that I may behold you are not some form of the treachery that pursues me."

"An attempt was indeed made—or by accident some evil drug was administered to my friend, on the morning of the tournament," said Bembo, intercedingly.

"Il Gobbo, the knight still raves!" said the nun, in a disordered voice. "Our presence seems but to heighten his delirium—Mona Faustina, let us hence."

Perceiving that the nun's step wavered as she retired from the couch, Fra Bruno advanced to her support; but resuming her strength with an effort, she repeated her reverence, and glided rapidly out of the chamber, followed, nevertheless, by the Penitentiary.

The physicians, not much surprised at a feverish caprice, dressed the hurt themselves, which was principally a broad laceration of the skin by Le Beaufort's lance, and withdrew, commanding that the patient should be kept very quiet. But Bembo's anxiety had become too great to comply with the injunction, and, at his entreaty, Alfonso revealed the adventure of the fruit and wine, and the reasons which he had to believe that Lucrezia herself had devised the mischief.

"And can it really be that angels to look at, can be devils indeed?" said the canon, bewilderedly. "I will tear my sonnet;—and now I remember it was a

strange word dropped by Master Burciardo, when he showed me over these gorgeous bridal chambers, moralizing something tediously on the vanity of earthly pomp, for he said ‘Who would have thought that within a month after so joyful a wedding, the royal groom himself should die on that very couch, like a deer strangled by the dogs when the hunters’ arrows had failed in many wounds to make one mortal?’”

“Said he so?” returned Alfonso, remembering, at the same instant, with singular effect, the ballerina’s declaration that at least Lucrezia feared not the revelations which these direful chambers might give forth. “By whose order was I brought to so ill-omened a lodging?”

“By express command of the Lady Lucrezia, and I thought it was to us the more honour,” said Bembo, timorously peering around. “But who knows? it may be perchance the chamber hath facilities we wot not of, for purposes of mischief; and now I can believe what you went so perilously nigh with your Jewess to prove, signor, that Lucrezia could give us a true report of Duke Gandia’s end.”

This conviction in another, which he had laboured so assiduously to procure for himself, was in a high degree distasteful to the Hospitaller; and he now indirectly strove to shake it by relating the whole process of his Hebrew discoveries. The canon grew every instant more and more puzzled, and suspended the destruction of his sonnet.

“All that I can clearly conclude is that the same hand hath been ever at work; but whether A’s, or

C's, or L's, are mysteries impenetrable," he said at length, with a fearful glance round the chamber. "Would to heaven, though the mere thought makes me shudder, that there be some ghost appertaining to this magnificence who would blab the truth!"

"Burciardo's saying gives me hopes of a less fearful intelligencer," replied Alfonso. "The surgeons counsel me to eat—what if, when he comes, as thou sayest he often does from the pontiff, we got him into a talking humour over some viands?"

"To eat with him were indeed a good precaution," said Bembo, timidly. "But it might be dangerous to know too much."

"I would incur every risk to know but so much as might satisfy these devouring doubts in my soul!" replied Alfonso.

Some hours, however, elapsed ere the occasion arrived in the person of the worthy Dean of Strasburgh, who was later than his wont, for night was gathering in. Alfonso had long been silent, exhausted with the conversation and his emotion, while the canon tormented himself in silence with a flood of new and vague apprehensions. His reverie was at last disturbed by a gentle rap at the door; but as Alfonso seemed not to hear it, Bembo persuaded himself that he had not either; and with this conviction his teeth began to chatter in his head.

There was another tap at the door.

"Signor, hear you not that—that rapping?" said Bembo, desperately.

"Murder does not announce his approach; admit it, whatever it may be," said Alfonso.

"Admit It, signor!" said the canon, by no means delighted with the pronoun.

"Enter!" said the Hospitaller, in a loud voice, glancing at his sword, which was at the foot of the couch, and then looking steadfastly at the door. It opened immediately, and no ghost appeared, but to the contrary, the substantial person of the master of the ceremonies, attended by two pages with lamps. The radiance, and the heavy honest visage of the German ecclesiastic restored the canon's heart to its usual place under the fifth rib.

"And how fares it with your lordship?" he said, with an air of importance, but with evident kindness. "I come not now from his holiness, but from the Lady Lucrezia, who bade me say that she would not commence the saraband until she learned your condition."

"Nothing ails me but a little weariness, and a scratch or two scarce worth the leeching," replied the knight, carelessly. "I pray you return my humblest thanks, the more due because the less deserved; and then, if you have a few minutes to waste, it were charity, worthy master dean, to bestow them in cheering us with your conversation, the wit and pleasantry of which Messer Pietro lauds to the skies."

"And, truly, he is allowed to be the completest judge in Italy in such wares," replied the gratified dean. "But I need not hurry; it is a mere court sugar-plum. I'll warrant, if I had turned as I went

out, I should have seen her already in the saraband with Sir Reginald. He is the ladies' peacock now—none but he." And selecting a chair, he seated himself with a pompous sigh, as if quite exhausted with the fatigues of the day.

"Messer Bembo, have we no wine to commend to Master John's favour, spent as he is with the toils of his illustrious office?" said Alfonso.

"No, no; not for the world; you must not be allowed to taste a drop of wine for the whole world!" replied the German ecclesiastic, adroitly shifting the first too positive negation.

"Nay, 'tis permitted now," said the wounded knight, jocosely. "And Bembo knows what talisman to touch to bring us aught we require in these enchanted precincts."

Wine was accordingly produced, and although Bembo's taste was decidedly opposed to the tart wines of Germany, he imitated the dean in drinking only Rhenish.

"Heartily pledging your speedy wholeness, reverend knight," said Burchard, with a quaff which seemed to threaten his own. "It is as cool as if from the cellars of my abbey, which are under the Rhine. My laborious office indeed sometimes makes refreshment desirable, for heaven knows it were easier to keep a herd of fleas on the Campagna, than this court in order. Nevertheless, brothers, I shall deem myself happy if you will command me on anything to your service, which has been particularly enjoined on me. Drink,

brother canon,—but methought you preferred the Greco? Fear it not, it is very ripe.”

“Thanks to your care, father,—if I may call one so who is apparently not very much older than myself,—I lack nothing,” replied the Hospitaller. “To the contrary, I am too well treated; for methinks I must needs have turned some worthier person out of these chambers, which seem rather prepared for a joyful bridegroom than a wounded combatant?”

“You are right and you are wrong, signor; but you have turned no one out of his enjoyments,—at least, I hope not, for these apartments have not been inhabited by any one since the death of the Prince of Salerno, Duke of Biselli, whose soul all blessed saints assoil!” said Master John.

“The husband of his holiness’s daughter?” returned the knight, carelessly.

“His holiness’s niece, brother,” said Burchard, reprovingly, but not unmindful of Alfonso’s generous equalization of their ages.

“Ay, truly, his niece; but he loves her as if she were his own daughter? ay, and more!” replied the knight, with a penetrating glance which was altogether lost on Master John’s stolid visage.

“Ay, indeed, for he uses her counsels even in the government of the church; and in his holiness’s absences she has more than once had the whole patrimony under her orders,” said the worthy dean with a sigh. “Not that there are many cardinals who have a better judgment in state matters than

Domina Lucretia. I have seen her knitting gold lace, and all the time give as wise orders for the management of the city as if she were reading out of Proverbs; but the scandal of it, signor, the scandal! It is well that our poor Germans listen to nothing that comes from Rome but the Apostolic bulls, or they would be taking crotchets again like those of the poisonous Englishman, Johannes Wicliffus."

Once in the vein of complaint, it was not difficult to keep Burchard in it. It was strange how the German—all ecclesiastic as he was—managed to unite the most implicit veneration for the pontiff with a general disapprobation for his actions, or rather manners. Burchard was naturally garrulous and communicative; the wine began to assist his conversational powers; and finding that he was listened to with great interest, he related numerous anecdotes of the court which made even Bembo stare, and contemplate with a species of envy the man who dared to relate them with such freedom. But what principally struck Alfonso was the dean's numerous allusions to secret counsels and interviews which took place between Lucrezia and the pontiff; to which he seemed to attach some portentous significance. Alfonso silently interpreted these suggestions in harmony with his own black theories, although he clearly perceived from the drift of the dean's discourse, his dislike of the new courtiers, as he called the men raised by Cæsar's influence, his hints of the reasons which induced Alexander to wed his daughter to the chief of the rebellious

barons, that he alluded to some disunion among the Borgias themselves.

“And was it merely to make way for this alliance that the Prince of Salerno was murdered, deem you, brother?” said Alfonso, striving to conceal the anxiety which he feared his eyes betrayed.

“The Prince of Salerno, Dux Bisiliarum, was murdered on the steps of St. Peter, immediately before the great jubilee entrance, by divers unknown persons,” he replied, staggered by the very boldness of the question. “But perhaps it were not unseasonable to mention, although I received some hints to the contrary, that the chambers to the left of this tower are inhabited by Domina Lucretia, and her vigilant female court, who have more sensitive ears than any hare in stubble.”

“In verity,” said Alfonso; and he paused musingly ere he continued. “But certain it is that the Prince of Salerno was murdered; and so learned a clerk cannot be ignorant of the Ciceronian question concerning a crime whose perpetrators are unknown: Cui bono? to whose advantage was it?”

“Alas, my learning is not so vast as you imagine, and other people conjecture, seeing that I write in Latin with as much ease as in my mother tongue,” replied the modest Dean of Strasburgh, “which, by the by, I have almost forgotten, for Domina Lucretia told me the other day that I had transferred my German accent altogether into the Italian; and it cannot be denied she has a sweet smile when she pleases! But your Cui bono, signor, would lay the blame at Orsini doors, who were at that time far

enough from dreaming to become his holiness's sons-in-law, being in arms against him."

"Nephews-in-law, good brother!" said Alfonso, jocosely, adopting the late reproving tone of the dean. "But we heard in Lombardy that the prince perished not of the wounds he received—but was strangled in his own chamber of the Vatican!"

"You did—in Lombardy?" said the dean, vacantly. "'Tis true, he died very suddenly—for I myself—I had not left him many minutes—on that very couch whereon you now lie—recovering fast he was, too, when I may say, I just looked round, and it was over!"

"Then it is utterly false that the young man was '*strangled like a deer by the dogs when the hunter's arrows have failed?*'" said Alfonso, repeating Bembo's report of the dean's own words.

"Of course—utterly!" said Burchard, with a look which confessed the reverse, and a dim consciousness that he heard himself quoted.

"How fell it then, since you were present, and his wounds were healing fast?" said Alfonso; and Bembo hung forward in an agony of attention.

"Hi, hi,—I suppose you have your fears like the ignorant vulgar—ignavdum pecus, eh?" said Burchard, with an unconscious chuckle. "And to be sure there are stories which, I suppose, frightened my Lady Lucrezia from lodging here; for she is altogether a woman—the most complete woman I ever saw, in her ways! Not that I ever saw anything myself—but to be sure, I have never been in these rooms after nightfall, until now."

"Tell me then how it chanced—for you must own it is no pleasant thought to accompany slumbers in this magnificent desolation," said Alfonso.

"Certes, no; and I may certainly relate what I witnessed," said Burchard, musing by what means he might, without compromising himself, indulge in his beloved gossip. "You must know, signor," he continued, leaning with his elbow on the knight's pillows, and speaking in a low and confidential tone, "You must know that the young prince had five chief wounds, two on the head and shoulder, strokes of an axe; a knife run into his left side that missed the heart; a sword-cut in the hand, and a deep laceration of a halberd in the thigh: one would have thought he might have died of all that?"

"But he lived a month after?" interrupted the knight.

"A month?—let me see," observed the dean, with an air of deliberate calculation, which he assisted by many sips at his goblet. "He received these wounds (besides a score of less important things) at one hour after sunset, on the fifteenth day of the month of June; and on the eighteenth day of the following July he was strangled."

"Strangled, say you?" interrupted Alfonso, catching at the word which the dean, in the ardour of calculation, inadvertently dropped.

"What am I raving?" he exclaimed, starting and colouring to the deep rich tint of beet-root in a sallad. "Surely I was thinking of something else in my diary, for I enter all these little things for future precedents. But to our discourse, signor. On

that day, I mean rather night, (it was about this hour,) it pleased heaven most unexpectedly to release his highness from the flesh. Yes, he was recovering—recovering fast—for I came on that very occasion from his holiness to know how the duke fared, and found him propped up, just as you are now, brother, chirping little bits of Neapolitan love ditties, and—well may they talk of the light before death!—laughing at Fra Bruno's shaven crown, who had been sent to him with some kind words from the Lady Lucrezia, (though I know it was chiefly by his holiness's command,) and—what did he compare it to? Was it a turkey's egg? for, said he, 'tis no goose's, thine, friar Bruno! He was a rough lad indeed to be a prince—as rough as a young bear!—how he would anger my Lady Lucrezia with his mad ways before everybody—her fath—uncle too! And while we were talking with him, and comforting him, comes in a gentleman with some private message from his holiness, relating to the prince's demand that his wife should come and see him, which she had not dared after his furious accusation of her, as if that she—but that is nothing to the point. Thereupon we retired, as became us, the message being private—Fra Bruno and I—and, in very truth, I can but recollect with what a look he followed us, as an he would have bid us rest, but dared not! So there remained only Don Miguel and the Greek physician we call 'Il Gobbo.' ”

“Don Miguel!” interrupted Alfonso. “What, the Captain of Santangelo?”

“Yea, therein superseding the Bishop of Giorgento, a very capable man, but no soldier,” said Burchard, somewhat grumblingly. “Well, we went out—was I not there? We went out at yonder door, which opens into a fair saloon, much garnished with Venice mirror; and, not to seem listening, walked to the opposite end. Suddenly Fra Bruno plucked my sleeve, and asked me if I did not hear some noise, as of one that called for help; whereupon I, being I confess somewhat anxious to know for what cause his holiness had sent a gentleman not of his attendance—a new courtier, a servant of the Duke’s—went lightly back on tiptoe to learn what his highness wanted. But already, poor youth, he was at the last agony—Don Miguel and the physician both hanging over him, trying to undo the tight things about his neck, and so frightened they could not call for help. For my part, I dared not pretend to have seen; Fra Bruno had vanished, I know not whither; and when at last they regained voice, and I heard them cry, the poor prince was so dead that all I could do was to say a miserere for his cruelly parted soul!”

“Don Miguel—Cæsar’s chosen instrument—he did it?” exclaimed Alfonso, with such an eagerness and plainness of innuendo that Burchard gave a terrified start.

“Nay, truly he did afterwards deny to my face that he had alleged any mission from his holiness, and Il Gobbo confirmed the same,” replied the dean, suddenly rising. “And, indeed, whoever speaks of Don

Migueloto, cannot deny that he is a most honourable gentleman ! But now that I have set your mind on down regarding the natural death of your predecessor, I must take my leave, for Domina Lucretia will begin to remember that she sent me on an errand, and I have discoursed enough to give our noble patient a good night's rest."

Alfonso protested, and with great truth, that he had not discovered any soporific virtues in the dean's discourse ; and with mutual compliments, they separated, Bembo ceremoniously escorting the visitor to the corridor, into which the apartments opened.

The canon anxiously awaited his lord's commentary on his brother ecclesiastic's revelations ; and he was surprised at the earnestness with which he laboured to withstand his conclusions against Cæsar rather than his sire, which the share of Don Miguel in the tragedy irresistibly prompted. In vain he endeavoured to make it more palatable to the prince by conceding that the cruel deed had been wrought in concert with Lucrezia. In mere justice, Alfonso was compelled to admit the reasons which he had to believe that, however pleasing the result of the crime might be to her, she was not likely to have wrought it in concert with Cæsar. The canon heard with astonishment the details of the adventures of the Valley of Egeria, which established the fact of the dislike, even abhorrence, which she cherished towards the duke ; and not without a vague hope did he listen to Alfonso's scornful description of the fascinations he had despised. But he was filled, indeed, with alarm when he learned the false confidence which Alfonso had

put in the ballerina ; and it was that which induced him most diligently to search every hole and cranny of the chamber before he ventured to compose himself for the night, without in the least sharing his lord's passionate wish that the spectre of his slaughtered predecessor would appear, and reveal the destroyer.

The night, however, passed without the least sign of intelligence from the other world ; but the morning brought startling news from that without. Rumours of tumults and disorders in the city were rife, caused by the arrival of one of the Colonnas, under sanction of an embassy from the king of Naples, bearing, it was supposed, bitter complaints of the pontiff's leaning to the French in their projected invasion, accompanied with menaces from the Spanish sovereigns. The Colonnas were believed to project some commotion of their adherents under colour of this office, and to add to the perplexities of the pontiff, the barons had announced their determination to take the advantage of the juncture, and demand the fulfilment of their conditions in the alliance between Lucrezia and their leader. Complaints, suppressed during the first rejoicings of the Jubilee, were also expected from several other powers, even including the French, whose representative would take the opportunity of the public audience granted to him of Naples.

In spite of all his efforts to sustain his evil opinion of Lucrezia, Alfonso was so shaken by his last discovery of the circumstances attending the death of the Prince of Salerno, that hope involuntarily mingled sunshine in his reveries, when his passions were re-kindled by a message which Burchard brought from

Donna Lucrezia, congratulating him on his convalescence, and hoping that he would soon be well enough to embrace his friend, the English knight, in her presence. Alfonso replied with sufficient coolness to deceive the stolid dean, that he should use all diligence to see his friend, the English knight, under such gracious observation. He then carelessly inquired if Donna Lucrezia would be present at the court held that day, which master John sighingly admitted, waited till the physicians had retired, whom the dean accompanied without either nun or nurse, and then informed Bembo that he had resolved to make his appearance in it also. Knowing by experience of the tones in which the prince spoke that he was resolved, Bembo did not venture to offer any objection, though myriads occurred to him; but when Alfonso desired him to inform Le Beaufort of his intention, and to summon him to meet him publicly in the pontiff's presence, he insinuated a remonstrance, to which the knight listened with the utmost impatience.

"Tut, tut! I threaten no ill to follow!" he interrupted, with flashing eyes. "The minion will deem that I desire to hug him to the wounds he has inflicted!—But if I do, it shall not be so softly as I warrant me he hath had experience of some greetings lately, or ripe hopes ready for plucking that he shall when suspicion is lulled again or winks."

CHAPTER XVI.

SACERDOTIUM REGALE.

“This push
Will cheer me ever, or desert me now.”—
Macbeth.

ABOUT the time when the canon departed on his message to Sir Reginald, with a heavy and unwilling heart, Cæsar was himself escorting two muffled strangers, in a Spanish garb, through a back staircase of the Colonna palace, which he inhabited as his own. This passage seemed only used by himself, for he locked all the doors as he returned from his office of civility, and concealed the last key behind an old suit of armour hanging on the walls ere he rang a little bell, apparently as a signal to admit a third personage, who instantly made his entry. It was Don Migueloto, with a most gloomy and fretful visage.

“And now what says my ladye-love? Thou hast the most vinegar aspect that ever Love’s ambassador wore; but I know ’tis a new entreaty for my pre-

sence," said the duke, with a gaiety which the castellain thought singularly out of season. "'Tis so, by that writhe which in thy vocabulary is called a smile. But no, Migueloto, she will be better pleased that I refuse. She over-acted the part on which I set her, to learn if I loved her sufficiently to be jealous. Therefore, mark you, I am jealous—will not see her—will not come until my fears for her safety vanquish every displeasure."

"Signor, methinks it were to your advantage if neither fear nor hope ever brought you near her again, for it brings a curse on all our enterprises, your grace having a nun for a paramour," said Migueloto, resolutely.

"Are our enterprises cursed, then?—Why so, if success be the curse," said Cæsar, jocundly. "But though thou art something bolder than thy wont, (a good straw to show how the wind blows,) I am so far tainted with thine opinion, that I intend she shall leave Rome this very night, for which have a handsome train in readiness, with led horses, and sufficient carriage for the Sultan's wealth, which thou knowest she is supposed to possess."

"Signor, do you yield thus to the insolent fury of the Colonnas?" returned the castellain, evidently surprised.

"Their insolence and fury furnish me the pretext, and will stir her to the vengeance I meditate," replied Cæsar. "Enough of that, for the hour of the consistory approaches; but now tell me, wert thou not amazed to see so much good company in Santangelo the other night?"

"The captains of the Black Bands! I know not by what magic your grace lured them into your known stronghold," said Migueloto, very curiously.

"One which I employ on many others—perchance on thyself," said Cæsar. "I will tell thee all some day, when I would have thee smile thy sweetest; but already the spell works, and Oliverotto's report hath spread infinite mistrusts. Vitellozzo desires nothing but to leave the city, and scarcely will bide till this day's clamour is over. Yet I could find a use for a veritable magician;—'tis strange that no tidings can be learned of Dom Sabbat."

"An impostor, I doubt not, who fears that your grace intends him some punishment for his sorceries with Donna Fiamma," replied the castellan, yet very dubiously.

"But then the thing that haunts me may be a fancy too, and yield to the exorcism of as unreal a spell," said Cæsar, with a troubled expression. "I would not have the people see me stand agape, and foam like an epileptic in his convulsions; and yet to assume the very robes,—his robes of gonfalonier—which I must when I head the army!—I would give a thousand golden crowns to see Dom Sabbat again."

"No diligence shall be lost, signor," replied Migueloto; "for in truth men prattle boldly enough of us now!"

"They think my sun is setting that is scarcely yet above the horizon!" said Cæsar, in a rapt tone, almost instantly reverting into his usual one. "And methinks it were not amiss to example one of the

meaner railers ; let me have Paschino's tongue slit to-day, the dwarf tailor of Piazza Navona, who says such witty things of us all that Machiavelli himself asks his company."

"It were little good ; he will set the statues a gibbering then," replied the castellan.

"There is one before his house for the purpose,—let it be done!" returned the duke. "And that which they call Marforio, where the beggars go to exchange the lies of the city, may answer it!—A merry conversation, and the only one which I will allow on my matters in Rome. But how dismally thou starest ! I'll warrant deeming all lost, as thou didst when the mad Miriam burst upon us ! Cheer up, man, I was never in better case than I am now."

"With the French, the Spaniards, the Ferrarese, the Orsini, the Colonnas, the Pontiff, Donna Lucrezia, all on us at once !" said the castellan, with a dry Spanish shrug.

"Even so ; the first unwind of the whole web is in my hand," said Cæsar. "And yet I blame not those incredulous beards ! Come, I will give thee some comfort : know, that the Spaniards and French are driven by my provocations to the public outrages they meditate to-day, only that I may win the pontiff to my long-projected partition of Naples between them—a black treachery, which I trust will work them both a reward in years of bloodshed and mutual slaughter ! Even for this have I urged the Neapolitans to their insolence, suffered the Colonnas to enter the city ! The Orsini are my dupes, and to-day will lose for

ever the favour of the pontiff, by their rebellious violence—and for Lucrezia ! Oh, thou hast not heard our Lucrezia's last project ! And thereupon pay Mona Faustina ten gold crowns ; albeit she declares that only the love of her nurseling induces her to betray her—virtue should be rewarded ! Why, man, Lucrezia is so stung with the Hospitaller's slights, that she has vowed by something that women swear by, to compel him to love her—herself—in her proper person—Lucrezia Borgia ! and then to retaliate all his disdain.”

“ Is he to die, then, signor ? ” said the castellan, eagerly.

“ Unless he lives for ever, doubtless, some day—but not until she has so far fixed her dotage upon him as to make the alliance with Ferrara, or any other, hateful to her ! Therefore I mean to aid her plans, caring meantime in a way of my own that no ill comes of it,” continued Cæsar. “ I shall be absent for awhile, leaving this Lombard savage's disgust and increased suspicions and Faustina ever on guard, at whose least intimation of danger it will be your charge to reveal his true errand to the pontiff, upon which, if he be not abruptly hurried out of Rome, out of a wider iniquity he will be ! But I meditate a finer stroke of nature ! Notte and Morta tell us that she attempted by a sleepy potion to prevent the Lombard from appearing against her in the tournament ; she has begun, it seems, to dabble in those tempting powers ! What if by his scorns and contempts we could drive her to his destruction—to love him so well as to slaughter him ! Smile, man, smile at the triumph of it ! ”

“Nay, ’tis like enough for a woman to do, and then weep her eyes out over the poor man’s dust,” said Migueloto.

“But we must remove an obstacle which threatens to thwart us all,” returned the duke. “Faustina has a fine ear for keyholes, and I find that the Penitentiary, Fra Bruno, insists that Lucrezia, as an expiation for her fault, shall herself accuse the Ferrarese to her father. This she ferociously refuses;—but she dares not long walk about in the sunshine under her confessor’s wrath, so that we must either be rid of him, or resign our project.”

“Would your grace—against so saintly a man—after that proof of a special providence watching over him?” said the castellan.

“I intend him no other harm than what were perchance his safety,—for the Orsini are much enwrathed against him, and mean to exhibit his sermon among their complaints to-day,—a few weeks’ meditation in Santangelo,” returned Cæsar. “Neither are his pratings to be suffered, scattering ill seed on these specimens of all the clays of man. Tell me, is not Fra Biccocco given to boast of his master?”

“Your grace knows we have oft gathered intelligence from the like,” returned the castellan.

“Then he shall become his accuser. Some crafty witnesses shall question him what the Penitentiary meant by averring the Orsini match fulminated from above. To-night he shall be in Santangelo, at their demand, on accusation of heresy, denying the power of the keys in the matter of Lucrezia’s divorces—

nay, the first, I think his conceits run on," said Cæsar, musingly. "The rest will follow—for this Hospitaller seems to be one of those pragmatical knaves who must have the whole tree, or they'll not a cherry on it!"

"Such is our Spanish fancy too, signor," said the Catalan drily.

"Yet the wild birds starve not in your country more than in Italy," replied Cæsar. "But I have no leisure to reason the matter further; thou hast thy commissions, and I must now to execute mine own."

With these words, and with a gesture which more emphatically expressed the command conveyed, Cæsar dismissed his satellite.

Purposely delaying until he knew that the court was assembled, he made his appearance in the Sala Regia among the last of the personages of any consequence who entered it, with a slow and dejected gait, very different from his usual rapidity of motion. His dress was remarkably negligent, and his countenance so haggardly pale, that it probably owed something to art.

The pontiff was seated in his usual state, surrounded by the great officers of his court; and at one of the vast gilded doors at the extremity opening into the palace stood Lucrezia, with some of her ladies, and several of the younger courtiers, among whom was Sir Reginald, as if merely in curiosity to witness the spectacle. The countenance of Le Beauport was elate with joy, for he had not long received Bembo's message, which he had obviously misin-

terpreted into one of good-will, the canon purposely suppressing its covert hostility in hope that, after all, peace might be made. But Cæsar's rapid eye had detected in a remote corner the figure of the Hospitaller, in some degree disguised, by having changed his black mantle for the scarlet one worn by his order in war time, and screened by the crowd who pressed before him, and he marked with satisfaction the look with which he surveyed the distant group at the golden portal.

The ambassador from Naples was not yet admitted, but one from almost every other European power was present; and the Orsini, with a great throng of the barons of their party, were ominously gathered together in the centre of the chamber of audience. Cæsar's arrival seemed to be waited for, and many significant looks were exchanged when it was seen with what profound and almost cringing respect he saluted the assembly, and the extra warmth with which he embraced Paolo Orsino. Immediately that he had taken his place beside the pontifical throne, Burciardo received a signal, disappeared, and returned, ushering in the ambassador of Naples, Fabrizio Colonna—in himself an assurance of a displeasing embassy.

Unattended by aught but his own pride and stateliness, the dispossessed chieftain stalked into the presence of his great enemy, evincing only in his knit brows and compressed lips the strife of passions within his soul. He was clad in complete armour, except the head, which was bare, and carried the golden baton which appertained to his office as

constable of Naples—a tall, thin, but muscular figure, with the strongly defined and massive features of a Roman of the antique mould.

“The Lord Fabrizio Colonna! we trust the message is more loyal and dutiful than the choice of a bearer would argue,” said the pontiff very harshly, observing the perceptible hesitation of Fabrizio ere he knelt in homage.

“I am the ambassador of Naples—not now Fabrizio Colonna!” said the warrior, rising abruptly. “When I come once more in that name to Rome—but let it pass. Holy father! I bear the strenuous complaint and remonstrance of my lord, your faithful vassal, King Don Federigo, forasmuch as he is full well informed of the favour and encouragement your holiness affords to the Lord Louis of France, in his projected invasion of his territories, more openly apparent in the dealings of your nephew, the Duke of Romagna.”

“Alas, my Lord Marshal d’Aubigny can furnish me with too ready a reply to this accusal, noble Fabrizio, to whom I heartily commend myself,” said Cæsar; and the Colonna cast on him a glance of unutterable loathing and hatred, such as a man might turn on some reptile, whose venom rankled in his flesh.

“Yea, truly, Duke, you did desert us at the direst pinch of our affairs, for which my lord vows a reckoning, in the matter of Milan!” said the impetuous soldier.

“To the pope, my sovereign, only am I bound to account for my demeanor in that urgency,” said

Cæsar, submissively. "But as also the humble vassal and lover of my lord the King of France, I intend to depart as soon as may be for Milan, to offer my excuses in person."

A general murmur of astonishment arose, and Alexander himself looked at his son with uneasiness and suspicion.

"But, moreover, I am the bearer of this letter from the mighty kings of Spain, on behalf of their kinsman, my master," said Fabrizio, fiercely, "which being perused, may perchance spare his grace the trouble of a journey to Milan. My Lord Datary, you are skilful in parchment hand, I pray you read it."

The Datary mechanically took a paper offered to him, but receiving a nod from Cæsar, he cut the silk which tied the epistle, and read it aloud, giving by his manner of delivery additional weight to the offensive parts of the contents. It was one long string of complaints and reproaches, couched in terms of feigned humility, in which the Spanish sovereigns upbraided the pontiff with his preference of the French, declared their determination to support the King of Naples against all enemies, denounced the Duke of Romagna as the cause and promoter of all the acts inimical to the Spanish interests, and in conclusion threateningly implored the pontiff to make him resume the ecclesiastical life he had quitted.

"Alas! what will become of my young bride if ye make a monk of me?" said Cæsar, without even smiling, while the courtiers laughed outright.

“We will endeavour not to forget you are an ambassador, Lord Fabrizio; but be brief in what you have yet to add!” said Alexander, with extreme difficulty bridling his wrath, and rebuking the untimely mirth with a glance.

“The rest is of less weight, but my lord permits me to urge two matters on your holiness’s justice, in his name,” said Fabrizio, darkening to the most ghastly hue of suppressed passion. “I demand that the laws of God and man be put into execution against the woman called, to the eternal blush of our name, Fiamma Colonna, once a nun, whom your tribunals have condemned as the paramour of an accursed paynim; and the restoration of the wrongfully seized and tyrannously forfeited estates, honours, and wealth of our house!”

“Merciless Ghibelline! art thou not satisfied with the blood which thou and thy faction have so long drained from every pore of this land, but must also thy brother’s blood, flowing in the veins of a most miserable woman, be shed to appease its thirst?” exclaimed Alexander, yielding to his anger. “Begone from our presence, and as soon as may be from the city, or your name of ambassador shall scarcely protect your substance of traitor!”

“Nay, holy father, even we, the Orsini, earnestly entreat you to restore the Colonna to your paternal favour and their inheritance,” said the Duke of Gravina, stepping forward with his hand on his sword, an habitual gesture with him when he spoke with any vehemence. “We would have your holi-

ness apply a general bandage to the wounds of the state; and in truth Rome bleeds fast from these of the Colonna."

Alexander stared with an instant's amazement at this unexpected and most dangerous sign of concert between the ancient and hereditary enemies, by means of whose disunion only he had suppressed the power of one.

"This is a new matter indeed! Colonna and Orsino knitting claws—tiger and bear!" exclaimed the pontiff at last. "But I forget; your cause is in reality one; your quarrel is only who shall devour the prey when it is torn to pieces."

"Holy father, we desire but to intercede for the Colonna humbly and wofully as befits your merest vassals," said the Duke of Urbino, plucking back his ally of Gravina; "and for ourselves, we still more submissively beseech of your paternity the ratification of the peace already concluded with Duke Cæsar, which Love and Hymen are ready to bind in chains of flowers stronger than adamant. Grant us only this gentle confirmation—the hand of your most serene and beautiful niece, in recompense of the Lord Paolo's long-devoted love—and we ask no more."

"Lucrezia!—she shall herself answer ye," said Alexander, turning and waving his hand impatiently to the lady to advance. "Win her consent, and we have frequently declared our own shall not lag behind. Lucrezia!—but what mean ye? That we should rise and drag our child to the altar, whither the loadstone of love only should lure

woman to debase herself to the earthy nature of man !”

“ ’Tis not indeed to be desired that your paternity should play the wooer in this matter,” said Fabrizio, with a meaning couched in his tones which was lost on few present. Lucrezia was advancing with an expression of disdain and melancholy playing over her features, in unwilling obedience, when the words struck her ear. A spot of fire burst like a star on her brow, and rapidly crimsoned downward ; she pressed her clenched hands to her bosom, and cowered her face upon them with a natural gesture of the most agonizing shame ; but instantly conscious of the interpretation which might be put on her action, her proud spirit rallied as rapidly as it had yielded. With a bright flashing glance of contempt and defiance at the Colonna, her fine lip and nostril instinct like a celestial’s with a beautiful ire, she quickened her step, the courtiers making way for her with emulous rapidity, until she reached the steps of the throne, on which sat Alexander, in awful silence, the fierceness of his nature struggling with its policy that counselled the prudence of not affecting to perceive the Colonna’s black innuendo.

“ Holy father, I am here, to obey your holiness’s command in this and in all things, save where obedience is but its own counterfeit, as to profess with the lips what the heart disavows,” she said, in her sweet but now firm and resolved tones. “ Rather than which, since I am the cause of so much trouble and turmoil to your paternity, let me retire and

end my days in peace in some nunnery—remote from all.”

“Signor, if this request is listened to—which ’tis well known Donna Lucrezia can but propound in jest—neither I nor my friends but must needs conclude—it must be that the glorious hope was only extended to lure us into some pitfall—to plunge me into eternal misery ; for without this guarantee, friends, barons, Vitellozzo, Urbino ! we cannot, we ought not, we will not be satisfied !” was the broken harangue of Paolo Orsino, his visage flaming like a comet’s, and with his hair tossed as disorderedly about in his agitation.

“So think we all !” shouted Vitellozzo. “We will accept no other pledge of your holiness’s good faith ! We have been cheated too often with snow for barley !”

“Rebellious vassal, thou liest !” exclaimed Alexander, turning furiously to the speaker. “Thou and thy fellow-robbers repay us with this insolence only for too much lenity and forbearance. But we will take a lesson now which shall last us for the remainder of our time.”

“Signor, we complain not on idle surmises,” said the Orsino, striving to restrain his own vehemence. “In your very presence, as if by some potent command, a monk is suffered to preach heresies against us, denying your supreme powers before the whole Christian world ! And it is known—the Lady Lucrezia herself will not deny it—an envoy from Ferrara is among us, who has been honoured with her repeated private audience.”

"What says our fair sister to this? What private audiences are these we hear of?" said the duke, in a tone apparently of playful mockery, as if he did not credit the statement.

"Peace, malapert boy! and let our niece reply," said Alexander, looking with surprise and suspicion at Lucrezia, whose quivering lip and rapid changes of complexion confessed some secret consciousness. In her exceeding dread for the safety of the Hospitaller from her father's wrath, if what she believed to be his real mission were betrayed, and almost equal fear of the shame which her own share in the adventure seemed to entail—Lucrezia had no resource but to admit the statement, with feminine tact counteracting its effects as much as possible.

"There is indeed, we have learned, one in Rome from Ferrara, who hath a mission concerning us," she said, with visible hesitation; "but to prove the little weight we attached to it—the little the Orsini have to dread from it—we have not yet judged it necessary even to mention it to his paternity, contenting ourself with vague replies to vague demands and questionings."

"Our Lady preserve us, since women, too, are taking it upon them to sovereign it in our place!" said Alexander, passionately. "But who is this envoy, and where may he be found?"

Cæsar glanced expressively at the Orsino as if bidding him remark how well the farce was played.

"I am bound by solemn promise to secrecy, unless to your paternity only," replied Lucrezia, much agi-

tated. "It is enough that I solemnly assure the Lord Orsino that the envoy's mission, so far as I know or desire, has failed, and shall continue to fail, unless falsehood can become truth."

"And on this assurance 'tis fit you rest content, Lord Paolo," said Cæsar, with his crafty glance. "But for your complaint concerning the seditious monk, if you can allege evidence, I am of opinion that the Datary should inquire into it."

"Even so; let it be done," said Alexander, sharply; and a general glance fell on Lucrezia, as if they expected some intercession on her part; and indeed she began to speak, but she broke off suddenly, turning very pale.

"On no assurance can my soul rest content but in the possession of its sole object, sole hope, sole everything!" replied Paolo, with wild vehemence.

"Oh, wherefore will you drive me to extremity?" exclaimed Lucrezia, beseechingly. "Surely all knight-hood and manhood are mingled ignobly now, since even the victor in so renowned a day of chivalry thinks it meet to woo his lady with threats instead of the gentle arts of love!"

"Teach me then how to woo thee, young celestial! for men have but learned how to woo women!" said the Orsino, kneeling in the adoration of his frenzied passion, and fervently clasping his hands.

"Lady, your pardon—but he who kneels before you is not the victor in that day, not of chivalry, but of all foul treachery!" said the Hospitaller, who had witnessed the dextrous screening of Lucrezia with

only increased wrath, imputing it to her dread of her father rather than to any desire to shelter him.

“Wherefore not, my lord, since your accident—since Sir Reginald himself—yielded it to the Lord Orsino?” said Lucrezia, starting as if she had seen a spectre, her face, bosom, and hands whitening as if to stone.

“Then to him of the two—or to both since they love to tilt in company—who shall dare to maintain that I have fairly lost, or that he has fairly won the crown of the tournament of the Colosseum, I throw this glove of mine, in token that he lies in his teeth—on which quarrel I will battle to the last drop of my blood!” said the Hospitaller, dashing his steel glove with such violence on the marble floor that it rebounded over the kneeling Orsino, and fell at the feet of the Duke of Romagna.

“Marry, it knows its way, for I am or was judge of the hurtle!” said Cæsar, smiling as he lifted the gage. “The women may take what part they list, according to complexions; but comfort thee, knight, for until I have to Milan, and counselled on this cause with the noble and impartial chivalry of France, no man shall achieve the prize; and as they decide so will I, and so mayst thou.”

“Brother of St. John! can it be thou wouldst have men think I took the vantage of thee in that luckless thrust?” said Sir Reginald, impetuously advancing.

“Only demanding of your grace to deliver my glove with the wreath, I cheerfully abide your

award," said Alfonso, turning disdainfully away, without deigning any reply.

"By Heaven, then, I renew my claims to the one for the sake of the other," said Le Beaufort, kindling with passion.

"Nay, sirs, you must pledge me your faith to keep peace among you until I pronounce my judgment," said Cæsar, smiling to see how furiously the rivals surveyed each other.

"We ladies will care for that; until your return (if it be true indeed you go to Milan) the Knight of St. John shall be our prisoner here in the Vatican," said Lucrezia, with great agitation, but attempting an air of carelessness and gaiety; while her blush restored such gorgeous bloom to her beauty that Alfonso's jealousy rekindled to its fiercest glow. "Faith and troth, sir Knight of Disdain!" she continued, without raising her eyes, "the shock of battle was no assay for the metal of which you boast yourself, but the furnace and glow of beauty and love's temptations—to which my fair court shall subject you in this pause permitted us, if you dare abide the brunt?"

"Lady, I do not fear a defeated enemy!" replied the knight, with a scornful glance; and Lucrezia's smile lost its sweetness, and writhed over her lips like the glisten of a serpent.

"Behold ye, damsels, he hath thrown ye the gauntlet too!—subdue this rebel, or I shall myself begin to think it possible to throw off your yoke!" said Cæsar, playfully. "I give the knight

into your custody until ye see me again; and look that ye restore him to me in as fair condition—nay, I trust, in better, than I yield him now to your mercy.’

General murmurs of approval, except from the Orsini, were audible; and Alfonso bent in submission, eagerly expecting that the evil passions in Alexander’s breast would betray themselves in his refusal to sanction the singular challenge. But infinitely to his surprise, he at first laughed at the project, and then more seriously added, “It contents us well, for we fear the knight’s zeal in a recent matter may have stirred him enemies, and his safety will be best assured in the Vatican.”

This open collusion shook the last grain of patience out of the Orsino’s breast. “My lord! since Sir Reginald courteously yielded me the prize, it shames me that it is not delivered to me, as if our stroke were indeed given in concert and treachery,” he exclaimed. “And if every other good be snatched from me, my honour is still mine own, and none shall ravish it from me.”

“If you desire not to anger me so as to make your hopes for ever in vain, Orsino, you shall abide the judgment of the French knights,” said Lucrezia, with warmth.

“Content you, Lord Paolo,” said Fabrizio, who had been listening in silent disdain to the whole dialogue. “Content you! a former peace was cemented by this lady’s marriage with one whose royal blood still cries out in vain for vengeance,

shed in the Vatican, by hands perchance as lily fair and spotless to look at as that you crave so passionately."

This last insult was too much for the patience of Alexander, never very extensive, and which only the pressing difficulties which surrounded him had hitherto sustained. "Traitors and rebels!" he shouted, "Begone, ere I order ye to be thrown out on the spears of my guards!"

"This as the reply to my private complaints; but to those of the king, my master, what answers your paternity?" said Fabrizio, in an unmoved tone. "Yet the Colonnas are not so unfriended in Rome as your holiness may imagine."

"To the king your master then, and our insolent vassal,—to all the kings of the earth,—I reply—that I have been elected by God the Almighty, and not by men, to be the father and controller of princes; and such I am, despite all enmity! That it becomes not the father's dignity to succumb to the caprice of his children, but it is the duty of children to obey their father's commands; and therefore I will never esteem them as lawful sons, but misbegotten bastards, who shall gainsay what I do."

"By the faith of my body, holy father," exclaimed Fabrizio, with rash violence, "there are abundance of bastards already in the church, without lugging in more!"

"My Swiss!—But, no; let some one remove him that would have him safe!" said Alexander, whitening with passion.

"And in conclusion, it is in my instruction to

tell your paternity," continued the unmoved Fabrizio, "that thinking and acting as you do, solely with a view to the aggrandizement of your race, to the ruin of the church, in utter contempt and defiance of all reason and justice, having banished all fit counsel from the realm, and plotting his unjust dethronement, King Don Federigo sends you his defiance; and the most Catholic kings of Spain aver, that if you persist in your treacherous complot to that effect with France, they will deny and no longer acknowledge you to be the common father of Christians; and this protestation I go to lodge with your principal Notary Public."

"And this is my recompense for bestowing on the Spanish kings half of this new-found world!" said Alexander, furiously. "But I would have them know that in my youth I studied the Roman law, and remember to have read that the ingratitude of the receiver gives the granter a right to reclaim his gift!"

"If your holiness had studied the canon law with equal profit, you would have found there are worse crimes threatened with worse penalties, and your daughter would not have had so many husbands!" retorted the half-maddened Colonna. "But my Lady Lucrezia here would shrink at the word,—so we'll be silent till the skies themselves begin to clatter it!"

For a moment, suffocated with the violence of his anger, Alexander actually gasped for breath, and then springing up from his throne, he shouted

“Guards ! Swiss !” with so loud a voice that the halberdiers stationed at the entrances burst in with their spears lowered, expecting that the pontiff was attacked. But before Alexander could shape his furious intents in words, Lucrezia was kneeling at his feet and supplicating his forbearance ; Cæsar, the cardinals, and ambassadors all uniting in entreaties.

Alexander’s reason was frequently a counterpoise even to his violent passions ; and speaking now in the voice of his beloved daughter, it exercised a powerful and unexpected influence. “Thou sayest truly, my child ! dearer to my heart than the life blood that warms it !” he said, after a terrible pause. “It becomes not our majesty to altercate with traitors and rebels—wherefore we will leave these to choke in their own venom, giving them till sunset to make their protestations, when if we find them out of their holes, rather than miss their destruction we will set the very stubble of their mowed faction on fire !”

Then descending the steps of the throne, as if in more signal scorn of the upbraidings of his adversaries, the pontiff took his daughter’s hand, and strode with the step of an angry warrior rather than of a priest to the golden portal. There he turned to give a parting look of defiance, without in the least noticing the kneeling homage of his courtiers, his fierce gaze glaring on the stiff and upright Colonna ; and there the Hospitaller noted that Lucrezia beckoned almost imperceptibly to Le Beaufort, dropping her kerchief purposely as she entered the portal.

The young knight immediately darted forward, raised the embroidered woof, and as he hastened after the fair owner to restore it, the portals swung to, and the audience were left staring at each other.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ But, oh ! what damned minutes tells he o’er
Who dotes, yet doubts ; suspects, yet strongly loves.”

Othello.

NEVER were reflections more involved and perplexed than those with which Alfonso reviewed the circumstances of the extraordinary scene above detailed, in connexion with his recent adventures and ancient suspicions. The continued chafing of the whole stream of his discoveries against Cæsar alone ; the security with which the aged pontiff assented to his daughter’s caprice, which admitted a handsome and young man, for whom she had already betrayed a regard, into her frequent presence and close neighbourhood ; Lucrezia’s evident zeal for his safety, her affectionate attendance in the character of the nun, so incompatible with the hatred which he imagined had induced her to seek his life ; no effort of prejudice could make these jarring chords harmonize. The recollection of her infinite fascinations now worked so powerfully in his soul that the knight laboured to disgust himself by the thought that the licentious

beauty still projected his conquest; an idea which he cherished the more pertinaciously as it offered some assurance against his fears of Sir Reginald's new favour.

While these fairer thoughts continued to spread their light over his suspicions, Alfonso scarcely knew whether to be alarmed or pleased with the exposition he had witnessed of the unsubstantial nature of the Borgia power, and the ruin which seemed to threaten their grandeur. He endeavoured to persuade himself, by rejoicing in it, that he had abandoned all thought of Lucrezia; but the panic which visited him when, by the news which were shortly promulgated in Rome, it seemed that the Borgias themselves acknowledged their own downfall, might have convinced him to the contrary.

After a long council held in the Vatican, rumours were current that the Duke of Romagna was actively engaged in attempts to bring about a reconciliation with the discontented barons. The extremity of the peril appeared in the terms to which the Borgias submitted, and which one after the other fell upon the astonished ears of politicians, like the louder and louder rumble of approaching thunder. Suddenly, Paolo Orsino was declared Senator of Rome; an office which his family had long sought in vain, and which gave him an almost unlimited authority in the city. Immediately after, the fanatic populace were thrown into ferment by tidings that the Penitentiary, Fra Bruno, was seized in his hermitage and sent to Santangelo, on charge of preaching heretic and seditious doctrine against the

projected marriage. A still greater marvel, their support prevailed more in favour of the Colonnas than the entreaties of the Spanish and Neapolitan kings had yet availed. Fabrizio received intimation that, on the formal surrender of their fiefs to the church, all should be restored to the Colonnas; and to dissipate, it was asserted, the scandalous reports concerning their niece, Donna Fiamma, certain stipulations being made for her safety, she was ordered to quit Rome, with all her wealth, and to retire to Capua, in the dominion of Naples. On these concessions, Fabrizio discontinued the mutinous assemblies of his adherents, and returned to Naples, to consult with the other exiles of his family.

Undreaming of the use to which Cæsar had put his presence in Rome, in deceiving the barons into the belief of the pontiff's underhand dealings with Ferrara; still less the motives of his apparently desperate intention of placing his person in the power of the exasperated French; Alfonso could not but share Bembo's apprehensions, that the immediate conclusion of the marriage with their heir was among the Orsini stipulations. This was farther confirmed by tidings that Vitellozzo was to leave Rome with his legions—a measure betokening the confidence of the barons. And then indeed was Alfonso's soul tossed about in a stormy sea of contrary passions and impulses; and to finish his agitation, on the evening of the council, Burchard summoned him in a secret and mysterious manner to the pontiff's presence in the adjoining palace in-

habited by Donna Lucrezia, with whom he usually supped. He doubted not that the interview was concerning his supposed embassy; and in what light Lucrezia had represented it he could only conjecture; so that not unreasonably a direful thought assailed him, that she had contrived all that had happened in order to consummate her vengeance more terribly, by betraying him to her sire, and rousing his vindictive passions to their wildest excess. In his dark musings the thought occurred to him that the transcendantly guilty pair intended to sacrifice him in some fell manner, which should strike terror into all who in future ventured to pry into their misdeeds. But the certainty which he felt that, if such were the project, even the discovery of his real rank and name would only deepen the wrath of the criminals, the impossibility of resistance, and his natural courage, enabled him to comply with Burchard's message, and to follow him without much more than a momentary hesitation.

Traversing a long corridor, they entered a vast and magnificent suite of chambers, overlooking the luxurious gardens of the Vatican and a considerable portion of the distant city. The pomp, the bloom, the fragrance, the noble panorama from window to window, were unnoticed by the agitated Hospitaller; and when Burchard raised the purple hangings into a saloon in which he was informed the pontiff was at supper, his hand was on his sword, as if he expected a sudden onset of assassins. But none appeared; and Burchard laid his finger on his lips to enjoin silence, when, stepping in, it was audible that Lucrezia

was singing, and with the charmed voice of the ballerina of the capitol.

Alfonso's soul darkened, when in those bewitching and subduing tones he felt that the magic was again exercised to which his own angry and perturbed spirit had formerly yielded, and saw that the pontiff's countenance resembled a storm-vexed sky calming in the soft evening light. The entrance of the dean with his charge was not apparently observed, for Alexander's eyes were fixed in a deep and mournful reverie on his daughter, although the air she sung was brisk and full of gaiety—a Spanish roundel, the termination of which was ever

“ El villano al tamboril,
Y el paysan à las sonajas ! ”

and Lucrezia's head was turned away, seated at the foot of a spacious couch of wrought velvet on which Alexander reclined. A window between two lofty pillars, emblazoned with a rich Gothic painting, was partially opened, admitting a cool, flowery breeze from the gardens below ; and beneath it was a table spread with confections, fruit, wine, and flowers. At a very respectful distance sat Mona Faustina, knitting lace, and but for the evil pucker of her lips, a most respectable matron to look at—on whose presence Alfonso put no stress. Yet, though he analyzed the expression of the pontiff's gaze with the severest tests of moral chemistry, he could detect no evil in the depths of its serene and sorrowful tenderness.

It might be that some sound of their entrance came to the fine organs of Lucrezia, for Alfonso remarked with trouble that she glided farther down the couch, and broke off in the midst of the lively air. "Ay de mí! but your paternity seems not in the tune of this country merriment, nor in truth is your minstrel!" she said very sweetly, and yet with a sigh. "Nor have I sung you my little silly ballad of two lovers who, forsooth, would part, though none bade them but their own waywardness!"

"Thou canst do, nor say, nor sing, nor verily, I deem, think, aught that is not sprinkled with something heavenly sweet, my ownest Lucrezia!" said Alexander, fondly. "But 'tis true—though it minds me of sounds anciently familiar—that merry, castanet-snapping air jars with my present mood."

"Then, dear my lord, the sighaways of these two loving quarrellers, that bade each other farewell for ever, will lamentably chime in with it," said Lucrezia, playfully.

"Nay, my Lucrezia! call me not lord now—let me hear that word which on thy lips floods my heart with such a sweet and holy happiness that I marvel what punishment heaven can have in store to balance it; call me thy father—thy dear father, if thou wilt!" said Alexander.

"My father,—yes, my father!" said Lucrezia, confusedly, and without the affectionate epithet; but suddenly adding with warmth, yielding to an impulse at once of pride and tenderness, "My most dear, all-dear father! for you are all to me! I have none to love me but only you, who love me better than all

could !—But to my ballad, for I am a true poet at least in this—that I must perforce have listeners, or my song is silence. 'Tis the damsel swans it !”

And she sung, in those most tender and melting tones which nature had given her in harmony with her perfect beauty, some Italian verses, which might run thus in our ruder tongue :—

I.

“ Though we part, and part unkindly,
Though we ne’er will meet again,
Hating as we loved—too blindly,
Breathes that thought to thee no pain ?
Though Love’s sun has set for ever,
Should no lingering light remain ?”

II.

“ By that moment’s inmost darting,
When we changed Love’s vainest plight,—
And blushed like earth and heaven parting
From their rapt embrace in light !
Oh, more slowly should it, setting,
Reconcile our souls to-night !”

“ But I’ll no more of it, since it troubles my father,” she said, breaking off suddenly, and with much emotion in her own voice.

“ Nay, it was but one word—parting—and a thought which came over me !” said Alexander, mournfully. “ But wherever thou art, my child, thy love needs not forsake me, and shall be the angel to smooth my pillow of death.”

“ I pray you, my father, talk not so sadly, or

what can I but weep ? ” said Lucrezia, with tears indeed.

“ Nay, even thou canst not deny, my Lucrezia, that two-and-seventy winters begin to count on me now—but that is not all ! ” the pontiff replied, in a gloomily musing tone. “ There were justice in it too ! —What did I say ?—But let it pass, only, ere ’tis too late,—I could encounter fate more cheerfully to know that thou wert safe from every harm ! ”

“ Let us think of aught else ;—here is my nurse’s favourite seguidilla, that she used to laugh to hear me sing when I could scarcely run,” said Lucrezia, striving to resume her usual tone of gaiety.

“ The grief and the anguish
Are over !
And the heart is once more,
As it was before,
Ere for one it would foolishly languish,
A rover ! ”

“ Ay, would she—when it was a mere plaything ! ” said Mona Faustina, half laughing and half crying, with a strange mixture of feelings.

A sigh, which Alfonso could not suppress, interrupted the lady, and gave her a pretence to notice his presence.

“ The Knight of St. John is here ! ” she exclaimed, turning ; and in a very rapid and confused manner continued—“ Signor, approach !—I have explained to his holiness what I have myself learned from your friend of the Valley of Egeria, that your mission in Rome is but to ascertain the true condition of affairs

among us—regarding me—the reports which—and I have placed you in a position where your own observations (for methinks you are very subtle!) may better guide you than from the remoteness you affected—while your person is in safety, for his paternity commands you not to leave the palace without the attendance which shall be placed at your disposal.”

The imploring and yet haughty glance which accompanied these words—the danger and difficulty in which any denial would involve both himself and the lady—the defiance implied—utterly confused Alfonso. Yet he was unwilling to make what should seem the least concession to her will, or become her accomplice in a deception, though practised altogether in his own service—and he was silent.

Luckily Alexander was busied with his own thoughts, and he looked round at Mona Faustina, who instantly arose and left the apartment. “She is practised!” thought the dark scrutinizer, vacantly watching the old lady out, who retired into a chamber of which he caught a momentary glimpse, half unconsciously remembering that he noticed in the distance an alcove hung with gold-coloured satin, most richly embroidered and adorned with little figures of the Apostles and Madonna, in silver, and that the ceiling was painted with an Aurora meeting Night—a suitable subject to salute the eyes of a sleeper waking.

“Good son, your cautions, though something too elaborate, are justified,” said Alexander, as the matron retired. “But notwithstanding all appear-

ance to the contrary—if it be true that Duke Hercules still cherishes the project which was once our own, bide with us for a time, until we can explain ourselves more fully, and he shall learn that our heart has never with sincerity abandoned it.”

So easily could this point be admitted, that to deny would have been a falsehood ; and Alfonso was irresistibly urged by his fears of the Orsini alliance to endeavour to discover how far it was advanced.

“Nothing is more true, holy father, than that the duke’s heart is still entirely devoted to the project which you once deigned to entertain,” he replied. “But what can that matter, or my longer abidance, since none can doubt that the marriage of your most illustrious niece with Paolo Orsino is determined ?”

“Peace, peace !—for after the experience I have had of their undutiful and rebellious spirit,—allying themselves with the Colonna, and with the protectors of the bestial ballad-mongers of Naples,—let your masters rest assured nothing but necessity shall drive me to it !” exclaimed Alexander, impatiently ; adding with a triumphant and wrathful expression, “But until the result of the Duke of Romagna’s mission is known, all discussion on this point is adjourned ; and then—but meanwhile, certes, the want of other assistance may bring about that necessity,—therefore let me have more definite speech from Ferrara, if he would have me understand him to a purpose. To his encouragement at this time let him know you are our guest, and that, in the presence of his daughter—

yea, of his daughter!—the sovereign pontiff declared that among all the princes of Italy Alfonso of Ferrara is still regarded by him as the only one worthy of her!—whose brave person and commanding genius are alike fitted to sway her to the love and reverence which a wife should render to her lord. You behold her beauty, signor, and albeit you guess not at the full richness of the treasury which is in her heart and mind, what I have said is no ill compliment to your prince!”

A suspicion instantaneously struck Alfonso that his rank had been revealed, and that this was a cajolery which the perilous condition of the Borgias suggested to them as means to win a powerful aid—for he was resolved not to believe in the sincerity of the pontiff’s desire to wed his daughter at such a distance. But it was as impossible to doubt the contrary evidence of Lucrezia’s reply and manner. “Señor,” she said, the white satin of her skin suffusing all over with a pinky tinge, “the love of women is seldom won by disdain!—and I am informed the Prince of Ferrara is but an unwilling hearkener to his father’s wishes. Ere we talk of love to him, let him talk of love to us!”

“It were indeed the fitter style, illustrious lady!” replied Alfonso, with a glance full of reminiscences of the Valley of Egeria, which Lucrezia felt to the quick of her fine senses. “But your anger confirms Duke Hercules’ apprehensions of the little favour which the house of Este now finds in Rome!”

“What talk you of favour, knight!” said Alexander, vehemently, “when I commission you to tell

your masters from me, that I still cherish such kindness for their house, as to desire to transfer to it this comfort and glory of my age, this brightness, this sweetness, this mere perfection of her sex, which envy itself cannot deny my Lucrezia to be!"

"Signor, I pray you!" said the lady, bending confusedly over her instrument. "Master dean, this is all his holiness desired to say."

Burchard took the hint, and retired with the Hospitaller, whose cogitations were still more perplexed by the interview. It was scarcely possible to doubt the sincerity of the pontiff's eagerness to renew the alliance with Ferrara; and it seemed a strong argument in Lucrezia's favour, that, knowing the envoy's real intents, she had purposely brought him to a position of close and intimate observation. But Cæsar's conduct was the most inexplicable, if he really intended to suffer him to remain with Lucrezia, after the events of which he was cognizant. It was true, indeed, that he had also witnessed the display of Alfonso's contempt and aversion, that he had a vigilant spy in Mona Faustina, and that he had heard his statement of his pretended embassy. Joining all these facts, the terrible thought occurred to Alfonso that he permitted his residence in the palace to give him facilities to satisfy himself of the truth of the allegations against Lucrezia and the pontiff. To the contrary, Bembo was haunted by apprehensions that some attempt would be made by the remorseless duke on his lord's life, more especially as Burchard brought renewed orders to him not to stir abroad without a guard.

Uncertain what else to do, Alfonso complied with this injunction, and remained for several days secluded in his sumptuous solitude, his wound meanwhile healing fast. In this space Lucrezia seemed to have forgotten his existence; he heard only, and with renewed heart-burning, that she shared in all the festivities of the jubilee, and that Le Beaufort was always in her retinue. The close of the jubilee and Cæsar's departure were to take place on the same day, and on that previous, Alfonso learned that he was to give a great feast to the papal court and the Orsini, in public token of their reconciliation, and to divert the people in the evening with a grand spectacle of a Mystery or Religious Play. It was the evening before this event, and Alfonso was soothing himself with the hope that Lucrezia affected this oblivion to deceive her terrible brother—an opinion in which Bembo heartily coincided—when the door opened, and the duke himself entered, alone, and unannounced. The canon stared at him in vacant alarm, as if he expected an immediate murder.

“Trouble not for me, signor canon; I come but to leave my good wishes with your valiant friend, and to press him, if it may be, to witness our show to-morrow,” said Cæsar, with the princely courtesy which he could well assume. “And also I have a little grace to ask of him, which my modesty can less stammeringly demand alone.”

To this broad hint Bembo replied with a most rueful and terrified “My lord, your wish is a command!” but without making the least motion to comply with it.

"Like most of my commands then, now," said Cæsar, smiling carelessly. "Come, I will finish your game at chess with the knight, three more moves will lose it; or are you fearful to be alone in these dismal chambers?"

"Wherefore should your grace so style a magnificence which a king might be proud to inhabit?" said Alfonso.

"Nay, if you know not, your slumbers are the lighter," replied Cæsar, more gravely. "But are we to be beholden to you, signor canon, for the licence we crave?"

Bembo looked affrightedly at his lord, who replied, with a quiet glance at his dagger, "Yea, brother, I feel no faintness now—and from yonder window you can easily come to my aid, if I should."

Bembo retired with visible reluctance, moving backward like a crab, as if in profound respect, but in reality to leave the duke no instant for any evil purpose.

"I would speak to you of a woman, and the subject asks for privacy," said Cæsar, as the canon moved out of earshot, and changing his whole manner into one of gloom and thoughtfulness. "But heaven forbid, indeed, that this chamber should not be of better augury to you than to its last luckless possessor."

"Then do I marvel, signor, that your discourse should be addressed to me, so all unskilled in female matters," said Alfonso, visibly astonished.

"It suffices me that I have observed in you the

rigid practice of a virtue, once the chief ornament of our Roman women, but whose very name makes them laugh now-a-days," said Cæsar, laughing too, but bitterly. "Therefore I would have you, during my absence, be in some wise a guard and watch over a lady who is said to be dear to me, very dear, too dear, and she is all!" he continued, even he, with some confusion under the gaze of the Hospitaller. "There is one whom you have, it may be, little cause to love—the vapouring English knight—but whom the memory of antique friendship may yet sway you to desire to preserve from a great snare and destruction."

The Hospitaller's agitated look, rather than his words, replied.

"The young man is handsome and daring, and—albeit my heart burns in fire to say it—I cannot contradict the general voice of Italy," continued the duke, musingly. "Yea, there are more tales to be told of this lady's pleasurable desports than would furnish forth the hundred amorous legends of a new Boccaccio! Yet some, perchance, of too black a hue to mingle in such sun-steeped reveries. Warn the rash boy of the north to take no courage from my departure! I too have a rival, whose dark vigilance is never long foiled. Let him know that; for albeit the chastisement is certain, it irks me that it should be deserved, and I am weary of bloodshed and evil report."

"What mighty rival can this be, or what damsel? Methought your grace was least of all men likely to

endure one?" said Alfonso, shuddering in his inmost soul.

"One whom I must endure may well make this rash stranger tremble—and such he is," replied Cæsar, with a satanic meaning in his eye. "And, in recompense, I will bestow on you a warning, for I misdoubt you have roused a vengeance which, Circe-like, shall fantastically blend the heights of joy and anguish and direness—as when, it seems, they bade the pretty Jewess invite my brother to his delightful slaughterhouse. Nay, my tongue wags idly! but I have caught an evil custom to prate on all things, in France. You guessed not what festering horror you stirred, moving in Gandia's death, with thought, no doubt, to win his holiness's kindness! Beware how you meddle more in it!"

"I dare not guess at the subject of these dreads; but deems your highness that I am of the stuff of which they make domestic espials and traitors?" said Alfonso, almost betraying the indignation and horror in his heart, for he perceived that Cæsar's expressions were purposely contrived to make him believe that his fearful love had been successful, and was still more detestably rivalled, and all the mightiest passions in his soul were stirred, when, remembering the malignant falsehood of the one insinuation, he began almost to hope in the possibility of Lucrezia's innocence in the other.

"Not so, most noble knight! I ask of you only what your virtue and Christian compassion might equally prompt," replied Cæsar. "I avow to you

that I leave an indefatigable watch in the person of Mona Faustina, who is bound to me by some ties of interest, and moreover I have two of her sons in my train. If this foolish youth, once your friend, grows too insolent, is it possible that you will refuse to drop a word of warning to prevent the ruin which must ensue, when the vigilant confidante informs you 'tis needful?"

This was a master-tangle which fairly enmeshed the Hospitaller, and Cæsar smiled inwardly at the confused silence which his victim observed, and which yet accepted the office thus prettily gilded with words. Cæsar, satisfied that he had done all the mischief that he projected, instantly shifted the conversation by inviting the knight to his farewell banquet; from which he excused himself by alleging the pain which he still suffered from his wounds. Blaming himself for protracting the interview, unmindful of the circumstance, the duke then took a most friendly adieu, and retired, to the unbounded satisfaction of the canon.

The discourse had renewed to their wildest raging all the passions in Alfonso's soul, and deepened his suspicions both of the pontiff and Sir Reginald, finding them so blackly shared by the Borgia, and collating all circumstances together. In vain did Bembo urge Alexander's desire to renew the proposals with Ferrara. Alfonso declared that it was only a trick to gain allies in the dangerous position in which the Borgian power was placed; a last card to be reserved against the detested necessity of resigning Lucrezia to the Orsini. Even her project on himself,

wherein he had founded his chief security against Le Beaufort, was now only a refinement of the most horrible cruelty and revenge. And yet Bembo took a little hope from his lord's conclusion, that he would obtain some *positive* proof against her, and then leave Rome for ever.

END OF VOL. II.

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